

Chapter 5

Analysis of the responses in the interviews and reflective journals

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4, I reported on the results of the study by explaining the themes that emerged from quantitative analysis of the raw data obtained from questionnaires as answered by the students after completion of their three weeks teaching practice session at early learning centres. In this chapter, I give an account of the results from the qualitative data, namely the interviews with parents (mothers) and teachers as well as the reflective journals kept by the student-participants. The data (interviews and reflective journals) focus on the experiences of quality in the early learning centres of the case study as understood by the beneficiaries (parents, teachers and students).

Following the thematic analysis of interview transcriptions, themes, sub-themes and categories emerged as reflected in Appendices L and M (Examples of data analysis phases). Aspects of quality, that emerged as themes from the data, are grouped in four themes (see Table 5.1), namely the daily programme; the context of learning; learners' requirements and expectations; and the requirements and expectations in terms of services and facilities in the early learning centres. This report also includes figures depicting results to enhance the discussion of the themes, sub-themes and categories that emerged from the analysis.

In addition to the interviews, results of the analyses of the student-participants' reflective journals (see Appendix R) (capturing their experiences of the *atmosphere* [see 3.6.2.1] in the early learning centres) are also presented in this chapter. The purpose of the reflective journals was to capture aspects that are not directly visible to outsiders like the atmosphere in the centres and relationships between the teachers and children. The student-participants were asked to identify what determined the atmosphere in the early learning centres and to indicate how they (as students)

experienced the atmosphere while at the early childhood centres by observing and reflecting on the behaviour, emotions and body language of the different beneficiaries. The student-participants were also asked to reflect on the relationships between the teachers and children and amongst the teachers themselves as well as on insights gained in terms of teaching/themselves/the children/the teachers. The student-participants furthermore had to point out things that they would have done differently and to clarify why they said so. For authenticity, I used verbatim quotations from these journals that provided the fieldworkers' experiences and insights on the relevant themes, sub-themes and categories. To distinguish reflective journal inscriptions from the interview quotations, I present each journal quotation in a block, in **green** and in a different font. Every reflective journal quotation` is indicated with an R and the student-participant's number.

Table 5.1: An overview of the themes, sub-themes and categories

Theme 1: The daily programme in the early learning centre			
<i>Sub-theme</i>	1.1:	<i>Curriculum</i>	
	(a)	Category	1.1.1 Current curriculum
	(b)	Category	1.1.2 Preparation for Grade 1
<i>Sub-theme</i>	1.2:	<i>Implementation of the curriculum in the daily programme</i>	
	(a)	Category	1.2.1 Organisational components
		(a)(i)	Structured time management
		(a)(ii)	Care and discipline
	(b)	Category	1.2.2 Learning opportunities
Theme 2: Context of learning			
<i>Sub-theme</i>	2.1	<i>Central and pleasant locality</i>	
<i>Sub-theme</i>	2.2	<i>Environment: healthy and safe</i>	
	(a)	Category:	2.2.1 Security, safety and supervision
	(b)	Category	2.2.2 Hygienic environment
<i>Sub-theme</i>	2.3	<i>Language of teaching and learning</i>	
<i>Sub-theme</i>	2.4	<i>Non-discriminatory and accepting atmosphere</i>	
	(a)	Category	2.4.1 Non-discriminatory and respectful
	(b)	Category	2.4.2 Accepting and accommodating atmosphere
<i>Sub-theme</i>	2.5	<i>Centre's reputation</i>	
<i>Sub-theme</i>	2.6	<i>Centre management and leadership</i>	
Theme 3: Learners' requirements and expectations			
<i>Sub-theme</i>	3.1	<i>Teachers' qualifications, relationships & conduct</i>	
	(a)	Category 3.1.1	Learner-teacher ratio
	(b)	Category 3.1.2	Teachers' qualifications, abilities and attributes
	(c)	Category 3.1.3	Teachers' conduct
	(d)	Category 3.1.4	Relationships between teachers, parents and children
<i>Sub-theme</i>	3.2	<i>Optimising learner development</i>	
Theme 4: Requirements and expectations in terms of services and facilities			
<i>Sub-theme</i>	4.1	<i>Available services</i>	
	(a)	Category	4.1.1 Core services: time and food
	(b)	Category	4.1.2 Additional services, extramural activities, extras, occupational therapists, outings.
<i>Sub-theme</i>	4.2	<i>Facilities that are child-friendly and conducive to development</i>	

When I started to analyse the data, I realised that it would be challenging to find exact themes for the different responses given by the participants. Many of the responses touch on more than one aspect, for example the child as well as the equipment that is being used, or the curriculum and the teacher. Therefore, during analysis, a particular response could theoretically be grouped into more than one category. I opted to incorporate each response only once in a single category during analysis using inclusion and exclusion criteria (as indicated before each of the categories). I started to group together answers that were the same or very similar and I tried to find commonalities between the answers. Finally, informed by the literature review and the number (frequency) of responses, I decided to organise the data according to four main themes identified in an earlier paragraph.

The question: “What do you perceive as quality in an early learning centre?” posed to the teacher- and parent-participants during the interview schedule, was an open-ended, non-biased question (see 3.6.2.2). Teacher- and parent-participants were not led or limited in terms of the length or comprehensiveness of the coverage in response to the question. The interviews were a rich source of information about the views and experiences of the parents (mothers) of children in the early learning centres, as well as those of the teachers (as beneficiaries) teaching children in the early learning centres.

5.2 CROSS-CASE COMPARISON OF TEACHER- AND MOTHER-PARTICIPANTS’ INTERVIEW RESPONSES AND THE REFLECTIVE JOURNAL RESPONSES OF STUDENT-PARTICIPANTS

Table 5.2 provides a visual summary of the categories of the different participants’ responses with a high frequency. The coloured blocks in the table show which participant groups (teachers, mothers and students) gave preference to the different responses regarding quality, as well as the frequency of those responses. All the responses are grouped according to the four main themes that emerged by analysing the interviews and reflective journals. The responses of the teachers are indicated in **red**, the mothers’ responses are in **blue** and the students’ in **green**. These blocks help to indicate which responses were the focus of any, some, or all of the different

groups of participants. From these data it was apparent that the majority of quality indicators were valued by all three of the groups.

Table 5.2: A visual summary of responses indicating beneficiaries' most frequent responses

Theme 1: The daily programme in the early learning centre	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Mothers</i>	<i>Students</i>
There are discipline, rules and regulations in the centre	11	30	30
The educational programme has a high quality/good standard	18	30	0
The daily programme provides good/sufficient, different learning opportunities for children's holistic development	32	21	0
The programme encourages learner participation	15	10	0
The programme has high religious and moral values	19	30	0
There is balance between love and discipline	0	14	21
The correct curriculum is being used	7	0	0
Children are exposed to group work	10	0	0
The programme equips children to be ready for Grade 1	0	23	0
Life skills are addressed through the programme	0	13	0
The programme provides enough time for play	0	12	0
The programme is challenging and stimulating	0	17	0
Theme 2: Context of learning	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Mothers</i>	<i>Students</i>
Children are treated with respect and taught to be respectful	7	13	15
There is a caring, loving and peaceful atmosphere	15	8	23
There is a friendly, safe atmosphere	16	8	11
The centre is clean, neat and hygienic	11	21	0
The centre is safe and offers security	47	47	0
The centre is central	10	0	0
The centre is close to the primary school	7	0	0
The environment is in a friendly, pleasant location	10	0	0
There is no discrimination, the centre is multicultural	0	8	0
Neat boys' and girls' bathrooms	0	0	13
Atmosphere: relaxed and comfortable	0	0	10

Theme 3: Learners' requirements and expectations	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Mothers</i>	<i>Students</i>
Every child is important and receives (full) individual attention	17	17	10
Teachers love children, are caring and warm (children are well cared for)	32	34	37
The children are happy and content and they enjoy school	16	48	17
Teachers are always prepared to be helpful and supportive	0	40	32
Teachers are professional	9	0	11
Teachers are well prepared	12	0	12
Teachers are friendly	17	0	35
Good cooperation exists between the staff and parents	11	0	10
The staff work well together (there is synergy)	17	0	18
There is a small number of learners in the classes	38	7	0
Children are the number one priority	17	15	0
Teachers are dedicated and motivated	12	7	0
Teachers are qualified	40	34	0
Children can develop to their full potential	7	0	0
Teachers are excellent	8	0	0
Children's identities are developed at the centre	0	13	0
There are enough opportunities for social interaction	0	35	0
Teachers build good relationships of trust with children	0	9	0
There is good communication between the staff and parents	0	14	0
Teachers are fair	0	15	0
Good relationships amongst staff members	0	0	13
Teachers have good relationships with parents	0	0	21

Theme 4: Requirements and expectations in terms of services and facilities	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Mothers</i>	<i>Students</i>
The classrooms are spacious	31	18	0
The centre provides extramural or extra activities	16	0	0
The playground is interesting and well-designed	9	0	0
The centre is fully equipped	7	0	0
There is sufficient and a variety of apparatus and toys	27	0	0
The playground is big and spacious	19	0	0
There is an aftercare service (after school hours)	0	11	0
Occupational and speech therapists are available	0	10	0

5.2.1 Comparing responses according to themes

Theme 1: The daily programme in the early learning centre

All three groups of participants put a high price on discipline, rules and regulations in the centre. For mothers and teachers, quality in early learning centres is comprised of a high quality educational programme that provides sufficient learning opportunities to enhance children's holistic development, and also encourages learner participation in a faith-based manner. Whereas teachers focused on the type of curriculum, relationships and facilities, mothers focused on school readiness, a challenging and stimulating programme, life skills being addressed and sufficient playtime. For mothers and students, achieving a balance between love and discipline was important, whereas the importance of using the 'correct'⁷ curriculum and children being exposed to group work, were primarily stated by the teachers.

Theme 2: Context of learning

A loving, caring, peaceful, friendly and safe atmosphere in the early learning centre was highly valued by teachers, mothers and students. All three groups of participants agreed that children should be treated with respect and should also be taught to be

⁷ From the interview quotes it is not clear what is meant by "correct". My assumption is that "correct" curriculum refers to a curriculum which reflects the centre's philosophy, for example a play-based or academically orientated curriculum.

respectful. A clean, neat and hygienic early learning centre was important to mothers and teachers. Safety and security was extremely important for teachers and mothers. Mothers, furthermore, valued non-discriminatory, multicultural centres, whereas teachers valued the central setting of the centre (near a primary school and situated in a pleasant area). Students indicated that they value a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere and also accentuated the importance of neat bathroom facilities for boys and girls.

Theme 3: Learners' requirements and expectations

Mothers, teachers and students placed a high priority on the happiness and best interests of the children. All the groups valued warm and caring teachers who loved the children and provided individual attention to them. Children's happiness and their enjoyment of the school were deemed necessary by mothers, teachers and students. Supportive, helpful teachers were extremely important for mothers and students. Teachers and students focused on optimising the potential of teachers characterised as professional, friendly, well prepared and cooperative with parents and peers. Both the teachers and mothers signified the importance of a small number of learners per classroom where the children receive individual attention and are considered the priority. Qualified, dedicated and motivated teachers are also rated highly by teachers as well as mothers. In addition, mothers considered a centre with sufficient opportunities for social interaction and the development of the children's identities as important. Mothers valued interpersonal relationships of trust between the teachers and children, good communication between the staff and parents, and fair teachers. Teachers valued excellent teachers who can develop children to their full potential and students highlighted the importance of good relationships amongst staff members and between teachers and parents.

Theme 4: Requirements and expectations in terms of services and facilities

Spacious classrooms were specifically important for mothers and teachers. Teachers also considered the following in a quality early learning centre: providing extramural/extra activities, spacious and interesting playgrounds and well-equipped centres. In terms of additional services, a centre with an aftercare service and the availability of occupational and speech therapists were quality indicators for mothers.

5.2.2 Comparing responses according to the participants

All the groups prioritised the children's happiness and best interests. Everybody said the atmosphere must be caring, loving, peaceful, friendly and safe, and respect towards children was valued highly. Children's happiness and their enjoyment of the school were deemed important by mothers, teachers and students. Discipline, rules and regulations in the centre, as well individual attention and warm and caring teachers who love and respect the children, were valued by all the groups.

A clean, neat and hygienic early learning centre was important to *mothers and teachers* and safety and security were of great importance to these groups. Apart from the curriculum and context of learning, mothers and teachers particularly valued a small number of learners per class. It was evident that children should be regarded as important and be seen by both of these groups as a first priority. For teachers and mothers the teachers' qualifications, relationships and conduct were considered an important part of quality in early learning centres. Teachers and mothers agreed that teachers must be qualified, dedicated and motivated.

Teachers and mothers (not students) thought that safety and security and faith-based values were very important. These two groups valued a high quality programme which offers different learning opportunities and develops children holistically and encourages learner participation. A clean, neat, hygienic centre with spacious rooms that houses a small number of learners; a place where children are considered a priority and where they can receive individual attention, was significant for both groups. Both mothers and teachers regarded qualified, loving, caring and warm teachers as very important.

For *teachers and students* friendly, professional teachers who are well prepared, were considered important. *Mothers and students* focused on a balance between love and discipline and helpful and supportive teachers. Aspects of significance to *students* were good relationships amongst staff members and parents, neat bathrooms and a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere in the early learning centre.

Aspects that were important for *teachers* (but not mothers or students) were the 'correct' curriculum, group work, as well as the location of the centre. Teachers also focused on the development of children according to their potential. For their part teachers expected early childhood education teachers to be professional (friendly, prepared) and to cooperate with parents and peers. In terms of services and facilities, teachers valued the availability of extramural activities, a well-designed playground and a fully equipped centre with a variety of apparatus and toys sufficient for their needs.

Whereas teachers focused on the type of curriculum, relationships and facilities, *mothers* focused on a challenging and stimulating programme, life skills being addressed, sufficient playtime and achieving a balance between love and discipline. Mothers furthermore valued non-discrimination, multicultural centres and the development of children's identities. Social interaction and supportive, helpful teachers were extremely important for mothers. Mothers also placed a high premium on trust and fairness towards children, as well as good communication between staff and parents. Mothers also ranked aftercare services and the availability of speech and occupational therapists as important.

Mothers furthermore placed a high premium on school readiness, whereas only a few (three) *teachers* focused on getting children ready for Grade 1. Teachers also did not emphasise that children should be learning something new everyday. This fact does not prove that both former aspects were unimportant for teachers, since it could have been implied by the high number of responses for a high quality, good standard educational programme. Other aspects that teachers did not focus on were the provision of enough playtime and having a balanced and varied daily programme.

Teachers additionally did not accentuate a balance between love and discipline, offering a challenging and stimulating daily programme, discovery opportunities, or group work exposure. In terms of teachers' conduct, the teachers concentrated on a few characteristics, for example care, warmth, love, support, help and friendliness. The following descriptions were not part of the teachers' responses: fairness, patience, passion, trust, reliability, responsibility and loyalty. In addition, teachers did not focus on teachers' abilities to address problems immediately, to be in control and

to listen to children. Another disparity was that many mothers (35) placed a high price on children having social interaction opportunities, whereas only one teacher mentioned it.

Mothers did not focus on the curriculum in terms of being 'correct', well structured and organised or reflecting the newest tendencies, neither were they concerned whether the centre is involved in the activities of the primary school. Mothers also did not focus on learner-centred learning activities being on the correct level for the children. The location of the centre was not important for mothers at all and apart from two remarks about bilingual centres, the language of teaching and learning was not mentioned by the mothers. The atmosphere seemed to be important to mothers and teachers, but they used different descriptive words in their interviews. Mothers did not mention an atmosphere that is warm and homely, family like, family orientated, relaxed and comfortable, small and personal, and welcoming to parents, at any time. Exclusivity, a good reputation, and being a private school, were not important for mothers, neither did they focus on the good organisation and management of the centre, having an adequate number of staff or whether teachers can express themselves in their work. Mothers, furthermore, did not focus on the requirement of teachers to have realistic expectations of children or whether teachers were approachable and were able to work well together. Core services like the provision of food, hours of the centre and fees were not on mothers' priority lists. In terms of additional services, mothers did not focus on the provision of a transport service or on outings. Lastly, apart from sufficient space and apparatus, mothers did not consider facilities like the media centre and gardens as important quality indicators.

There were certain aspects that were mentioned by *individual participants*, but which were not the focus of either the teachers or the mothers. These aspects were: creative content in the curriculum, providing a flexible programme, having a dynamic principal, having assistants and a low staff turnover. Having capable and experienced teachers was not the focus of any of the groups, however, it could have been implied by the teachers and mothers when they said the teachers must be qualified. Furthermore, neither of the groups focused on the teachers' abilities to observe well

or on core services like affordable fees, a transport service, having big trees and gardens or having an outstanding infrastructure.

5.3 THEMATIC RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

5.3.1 Theme 1: Daily Programme

In this section I report on the most important quality aspects as perceived by the mothers and teachers concerning the daily programme in the early learning centres. The sub-themes supporting the main theme (daily programme) include the content as well as implementation of the curriculum in the daily programme in early learning centres. I begin this section by presenting the mothers' (indicated with an M and the number of the participant in blue) and teachers' (indicated with a T and the number of the participant in red) perceptions about quality regarding the content of the curriculum and the implementation of the curriculum in the daily programme.

5.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1 Curriculum (content)

From the data, two categories emerged under this sub-theme. The first category deals with the type of curriculum and the nature of the content addressed by the curriculum. The second category focuses on preparation for school readiness in Grade 1.

(a) Category 1.1.1 Current curriculum

Inclusion criteria	This category includes data related to high quality and good standard educational programmes; using the 'correct' curriculum, being up to date and reflecting the latest tendencies in the curriculum; creative content; expanding children's knowledge; addressing life skills and basic skills; learning good manners.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to high quality programmes and current, up to date, appropriate curricula.

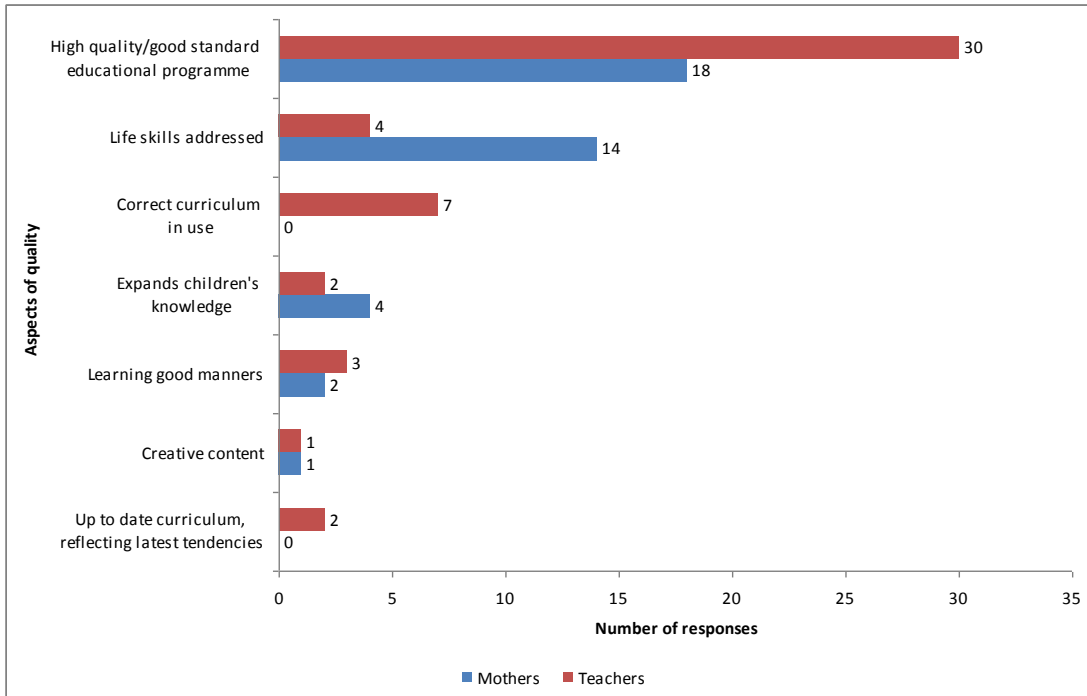


Figure 5.1: Current curriculum content

The seven items displayed in Figure 5.1 are concerned with the content and nature of the curriculum. The most important aspect for both the teachers (30) and mothers (18) was that the educational programme should be of high quality. A significant number of mothers (14 mothers versus 4 teachers) specified the importance of life skills⁸ being addressed in a quality curriculum.

M175: "My child must be able to play – and acquire life skills that will equip him to adapt when he enters the bigger world and school. Skills like listening skills, social readiness, emotional readiness, intellectual readiness, speech readiness, language skills and mathematical readiness".

The quotes below give evidence that the student-participants witnessed life skills being taught,

R40: "Teacher C's class has a really good bond/relationship with her learners and teaches them values and skills with a good attitude. Her goal is to help and benefit the child, to grow and learn in a fun way".

but that there also was the realisation that teachers need the parents' support in this matter.

R44: "I found that children enjoy working together, but that they find it difficult to share and to take turns. I also realised that education must start at home and that it cannot be expected of the teachers at school to take the sole responsibility".

⁸ Life skills refer to all the different intellectual, social, physical, emotional and creative skills that children need to cope and succeed in school and in life in general.

Some teachers (7) commented that the curriculum must be ‘correct’.

T20: “Using the correct curriculum and having high educational standards”

Quotes from the student-participants’ reflective journals provide insight into their views of certain aspects concerning the curriculum.

R10: “I believe the teacher in my class gives the children too many colouring-in pages. I find that the children do not have a lot of confidence to draw their own pictures. I asked three children in my class (age 5) to draw a bird for me and they said they couldn’t draw it”.

R16: “Today they did Letterland and learnt the letter ‘c’. I think it was maybe a little developmentally inappropriate for the three year old group as they did not seem to understand and lost interest very quickly and moved on to doing their own thing. This caused a distraction to the older children, as they were more worried about what the younger children were doing. During the activity I thought it was very clever that the children drew cats and around the cat they drew the letter c”.

R9: “The one thing I frown upon was the amount of TV time that occurred to keep the children busy at some stages of the day”.

R31: “At times I noticed that the children get exhausted and bored very quickly by the structured lessons. I would want the lessons in my class to be enthusiastic at all times. Therefore I would firstly create a fun; exciting atmosphere by surprising them by having a puppet talk to them first and then I would have them do a fun activity which will be a learning lesson at the same time”.

A small number of teachers (2) mentioned that the curriculum must reflect the latest tendencies.

T56: “Strive to always be informed of the newest tendencies in education.”

Two teachers and four mothers signified that the curriculum must expand the children’s knowledge. Three teachers and two mothers noted that a quality programme teaches children to have good manners. Only one teacher and one mother indicated that a curriculum with a creative content indicates quality. One of the student-participants commented on the lack of creativity in art activities.

R13: “If I were to do something differently, I might present more artwork activities to the learners. They don’t get many chances to be creative and express themselves in an artistic way”.

(b) Category 1.1.2 Preparation for school readiness in Grade 1

Inclusion criteria	This category focuses on Grade 1 readiness; programmes that provide good routine and stability; children learning something new every day; the involvement of the early learning centre in the primary school's activities
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes data that do not refer to skills and knowledge aimed at preparing children for Grade 1.

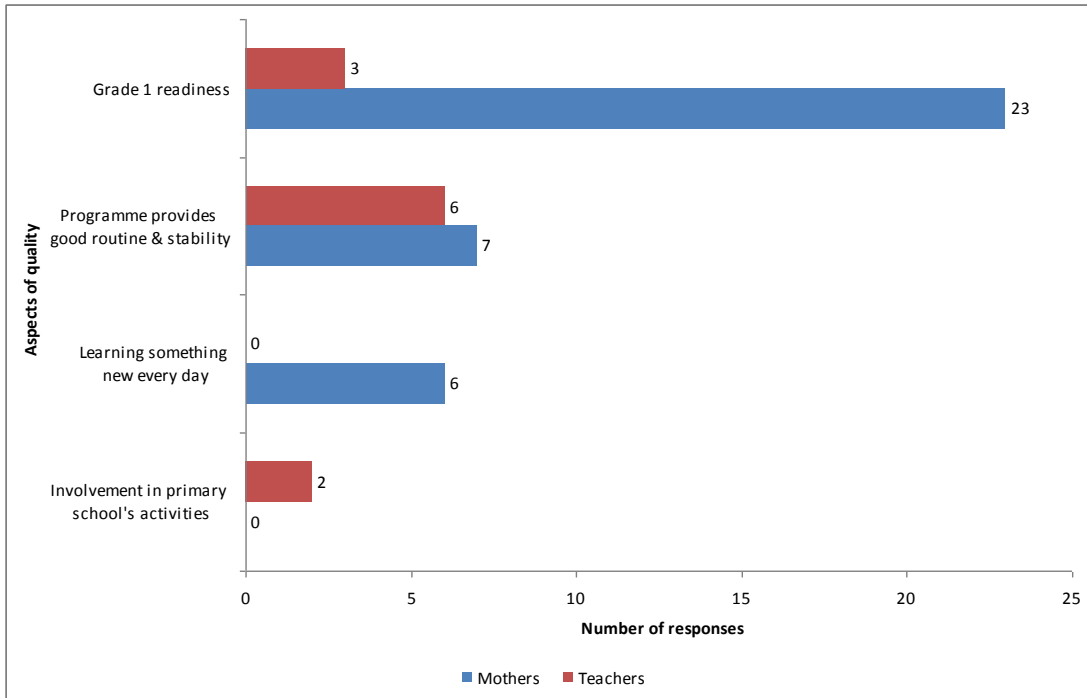


Figure 5.2: Preparation for school readiness in Grade 1

Figure 5.2 depicts the second category under the sub-theme *Content of the curriculum* and deals with the curriculum's focus on preparing children to be school ready⁹ when they enter Grade 1. The fact that the children must be school ready when they enter Grade 1, seemed to be of greater importance to mothers than teachers. Only three teachers in comparison with twenty-three mothers valued this factor.

M146: "I want my child to attend a preschool with high morals and an educational standard that will develop my child to the standard required for grade one".

T145: "To prepare the children to develop emotionally, physically and socially in order to be ready for grade one. Children must learn while they are playing and enjoy it".

Seven mothers and six teachers valued routine and stability in the curriculum. Comments by two student-participants regarding routine and stability give an understanding of their insight into this topic.

⁹ In order to be school ready, children need a readiness to learn which can be described as "a stage of maturity when an individual is able to understand and grasp those concepts and skills that have been deemed necessary for a child at a specific age to retain" (Davin & Van Staden, 2005: 5).

R37: “Today I learned how important the toilet routine is. I feel the teacher I am with does not insist on the learners going to the toilet enough and so accidents occur”.

R25: “Today I was reminded how important it is to have structure and routine in the classroom environment because the children need this to feel secure as well as to control their behaviour and so that the day can be productive. I also learnt that thorough planning is essential to having a relatively structured routine. I also felt that the routines could have been communicated clearer”.

Although six mothers specifically said that their children must learn something new every day, this was not mentioned by any teachers. A minority of teachers (2) had the view that quality is implied in the curriculum if the early learning centre is involved in the primary school’s activities¹⁰.

5.3.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2 Implementation of the curriculum in the daily programme

(a) *Category 1.2.1 Organisational aspects: structured time management*

Inclusion criteria	This category includes organisational aspects such as structured time management in the daily programme and focuses on programmes that are balanced and varied; well structured and organised; flexible; allow enough time for play and create a balance between play, learning and discipline.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes data that do not refer to structured time management and balance in the daily programme.

¹⁰ Some early learning centres are located on the premises of a primary school and are therefore seen as a part of the primary school and are often included in some of the activities of the primary school, for example concerts and sport days.

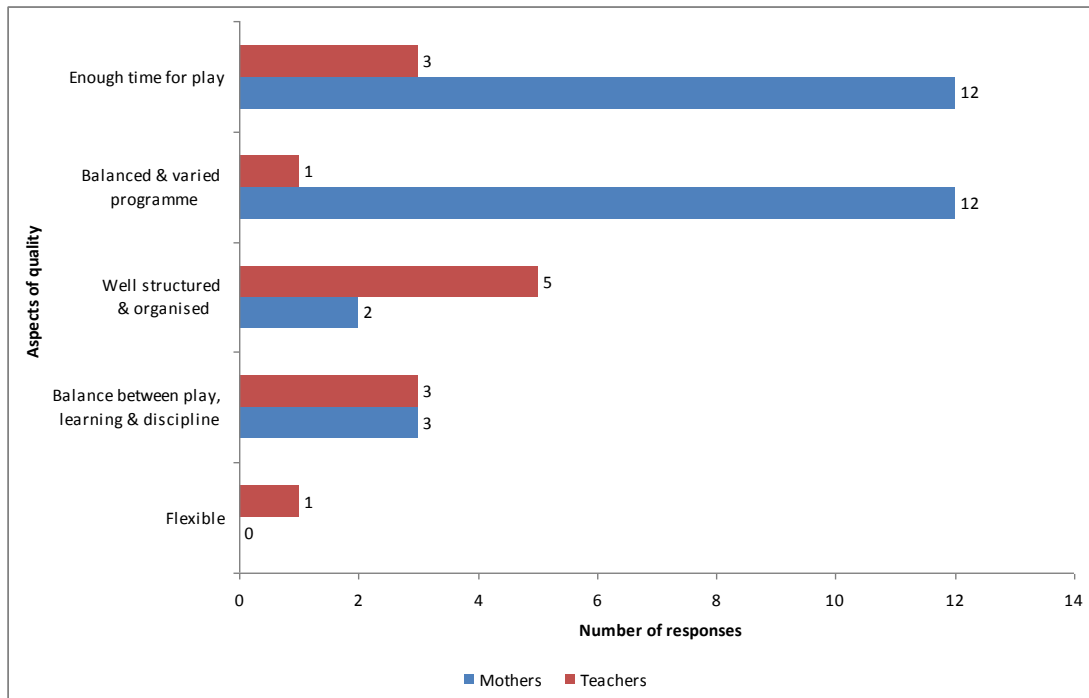


Figure 5.3: Structured time management in the daily programme

Figure 5.3 illustrates the responses in the category dealing with the organisational component in and, more specifically, the structuring of time management during the implementation of the curriculum in the daily programme. It is interesting to note that four times more mothers (12) than teachers (3) regarded enough play time as important in the programme.

M187: "He must play at school, so that he will be tired in the evening and won't keep his mother and father awake during the whole night".

M194: "She needs to learn the basic concepts like counting and the alphabet. I also want her to experience artistic activities. However I do feel that since they are still so young, they also need a large amount of playtime, where they are allowed to use their imaginations and play on their own".

An equal, small number of participants from both groups, namely three each, signified the importance of a good balance between playing, learning and discipline.

M197: "The teacher must be able to teach my child and she must enjoy her class, but she must also be able to use discipline where necessary. My child must enjoy it in her class and it is important for me that he likes her".

Student-participants' views on playing, learning and discipline can be seen in the following two quotes.

R40: “The atmosphere is set on happy children wanting to play and learn (operative word being play)”.

R18: “I have learned that I must not say ‘do not do this’ constantly when the child learns through play and experimentation”.

A small number of teachers (5) and mothers (2) stipulated that a well structured and organised programme is of importance. Only one teacher emphasised that the programme should be flexible.

(b) Category 1.2.1 Organisational aspects: care and discipline

Inclusion criteria	This category includes data related to aspects concerning care and discipline and focuses on getting a balance between love and discipline and the application of rules and regulations in a centre.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to rules, regulations and balance in terms of care and discipline in early learning centres.

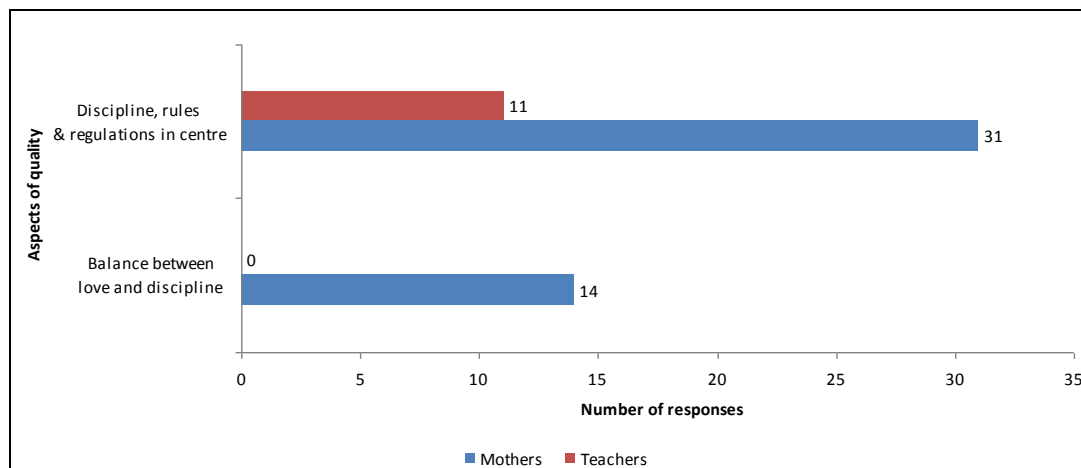


Figure 5.4: Care and discipline displayed during the implementation of the curriculum

Figure 5.4 shows that care and discipline, as an aspect of quality, was more valued by mothers than teachers. Many mothers (31) and fewer teachers (11) indicated that rules, regulations and discipline in a centre imply quality.

T234: “The discipline must be good and well structured.”

M 169: “A school that still focuses on discipline, not just in the classroom area, but outside as well.”

M194: “I expect my child’s teacher to have a certain amount of compassion and understanding, while at the same time being able to discipline when it is necessary”.

Discipline, or lack of it, is an aspect most student-participants reflected on in their reflective journals.

R37: "I also became aware of how every single teacher is different and has a different way of teaching and there is not one way of teaching. Mrs. L is much stricter than Mrs. J, but the children still love her and know their boundaries".

R37: "Mrs. C is the teacher of the Grade R class and the children enjoy her class as she is very funny, but takes no nonsense. Mrs. C explained to me that she is quite firm with the children in the beginning of the year and as they learn and understand more, she becomes less firm, 'lets out some slack'. This makes sense because the children learn their boundaries and take chances. I noticed most of the teachers are like this and the children learn their limits".

R18: "Some days the children are mostly disobedient, backchat etc. – it is not always pleasant. There are many challenges, but how you handle them will determine the consequences."

R23: "Mrs X has a calmer personality than Mrs Y and therefore calmness seems to fall over the class".

R47: "In this class there is not much discipline and routine. The children are therefore uncertain because they are not clear on what is expected of them. The children then become restless".

R18: "When the teachers are firm the children actually take them seriously".

R45: "The teacher does not instil enough discipline. The children are rude and arrogant. The teacher flicks the children's ears when they are naughty".

R16: "I noticed after the grade Rs got a lecture on their behaviour and their responsibility towards the school that maybe too much is expected from them in terms of good behaviour and they are still young and cannot be expected to police all the younger children as they get up to mischief themselves. However, some of the children's mischievous behaviour did calm down. I also noticed that more attention is given to the slower children as well as to the brighter children and the middle children get left to do their own thing. I think attention should be given to everyone on an individual basis depending on the activity so that a more accurate assessment can be made".

R40: "I learnt that being friendly and helpful is a lot easier than being over strict and mean to the children. And that although children do not like rules, they are necessary to implement and apply in a nice and fun way".

Although none of the teachers stipulated the need for balance between love and discipline, a large number of mothers (14) regarded it is very important. This noticeable difference between the beneficiaries depicts that discipline is valued more by mothers than teachers. The student-participants' opinions on love and discipline are noticeable from the quotes that follow.

R17: "As I walked towards the classroom, I noticed parents dropping off their children, some running to hug their teachers, others were a bit tearful and the teacher was there to comfort the child and tell the parents to rest assured, your child is happy and needs to be at school. Either way, the teacher was around and giving 100% to the 'job'. I feel that this was a huge factor in the atmosphere of the school, the teacher's ability to control and love at the same time".

R18: “Teachers enforced discipline, but in a loving, caring and understanding manner. Children are given a great deal of space and freedom with few rules and regulations”.

R32: “The learners know and understand all the rules and it makes it a lot more enjoyable for both parties when they can play and know that they are not doing anything wrong”.

R3: “The teachers are strict yet are loved by the children because of their friendly tone”.

(b) Category 1.2.2 Learning opportunities (daily programme)

Inclusion criteria	This category focuses on the following aspects of learning opportunities: learner centred; on children's level; provide good/sufficient, varied opportunities aimed at holistic development; challenging and stimulating; strong religious, traditional and moral values; encourage learner participation; group work exposure; discovery opportunities.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to varied, appropriate learner-centred learning opportunities aimed at the holistic development of children.

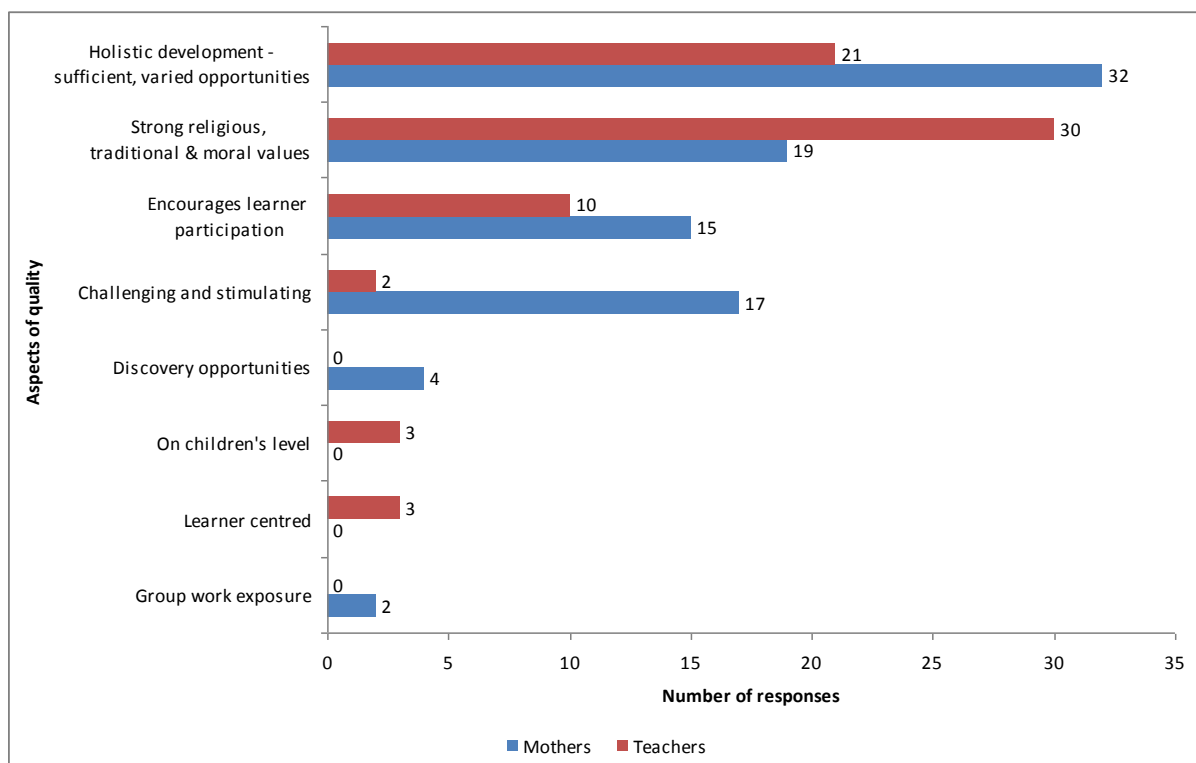


Figure 5.5: Learning opportunities offered by the daily programme

The part of the responses as shown in Figure 5.5 focuses on aspects concerning the learning opportunities in the curriculum of the daily programme. One factor in this category seems to be of very high importance to both mothers and teachers. Many

mothers (32) and twenty-one teachers mentioned the importance of a daily programme providing good and sufficient learning opportunities that are varied and can develop children holistically.

M187: "A good pre-primary school is one that helps my child to develop completely in all kinds of areas, for example socially, spiritually and physically. The school must help my child to become part of the community without forcing her to grow up too quickly."

One of the student-participants noted that a relaxed environment and appropriate activities can enhance children's development.

R14: "The preschool is a relaxed environment but the teachers ensure that children are continuously busy with activities that develop learning".

One of the most noticeable responses in the interviews relates to strong religious, moral and traditional values. It is evident that this aspect was very important to mothers and teachers. A significant number of participants, namely 33 teachers and 19 mothers considered it important for strong values to underpin the nature of the daily programme.

T 45: "The strong religious factor is an advantage and keeps the school together".

T 238: "I believe discipline, good quality teaching, Christianity and the upholding of moral standards are important".

It is evident from the responses that many mothers (15) and teachers (10) felt that learner participation is a crucial component of learning opportunities and should be encouraged by the daily programme. For seventeen of the mothers, but for only two of the teachers, a challenging and stimulating programme was significant. Two reflective journal inscriptions highlighted the realisation that children need stimulation and the potential of children should be kept in mind.

R16: "I learnt that if you have busy children in the class you have to give them work that will stimulate them intellectually".

R35: "I have learnt never to underestimate children as all of them have great potential".

Four mothers, but no teachers stated that a quality centre should provide opportunities for discovery. A student-participant had the same opinion and noted the teacher's responsibility to ensure learning.

R10: "Children love to learn and discover new things and it is the teacher's responsibility to make sure these things happen".

None of the mothers, but three teachers mentioned that the daily programme should be on the children’s level. The quotes below from the reflective journals project the student-participants’ views and experiences on the same issue.

R18: “Teachers ‘lower’ themselves to the children’s level of interest, but remain mature enough to handle situations fairly, firmly and with love.”

R18: “The school is child centred, teachers are excited to see the children and the children’s interests are a high priority”.

R10: “The children were very restless today. When the teacher saw the children getting bored she quickly changed her lesson”.

Only three teachers noted that the programme should be learner centred and none of the teachers, but two mothers felt that exposure to group work is important for the children.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Context of learning

The second theme contains responses that deal with the context of learning. Six sub-themes surfaced under this theme, namely the locality of the centre; health and safety aspects of the environment; the language of instruction; atmosphere conducive to quality learning; the centre’s reputation; as well as management and leadership in the centres.

5.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1 Central and pleasant locality

Inclusion criteria	This category focuses on the early learning centres’ location in terms of being central; friendly and pleasant; close to a primary school; close to the church; close to a park; outside the city; in a quiet/good neighbourhood; on a farm; or in a small town.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes data that do not refer to central and pleasant locations of early learning centres.

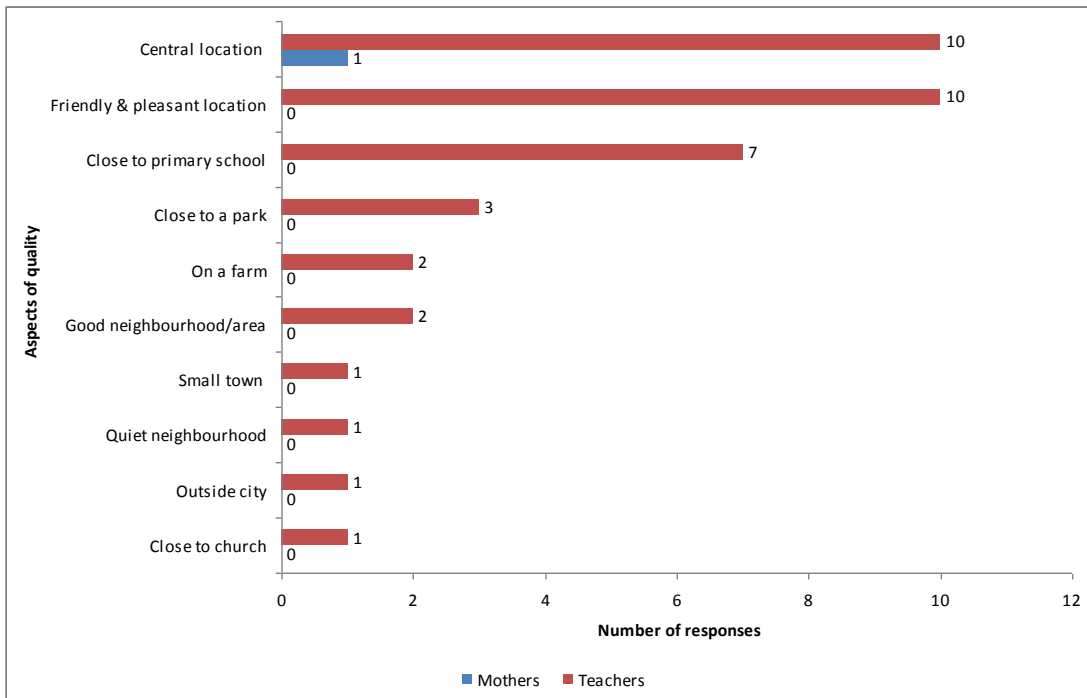


Figure 5.6: Locality of the centre

From the participants' responses, as evident in Figure 5.6, it appears that the location of the centre is not an important consideration for mothers since only one mother has commented on the importance of the centre being in a central location. All the other responses in this regard were the opinions of the teachers. The teachers indicated various aspects in connection with the location as important considerations in terms of a quality centre. For instance, ten teachers pointed out that it is an advantage if the location of the centre is central or if the centre is in a friendly and peaceful location.

T118: "A well located school on the parents' travelling route is important"

Seven teachers stipulated that a location close to the primary school indicates quality, three said "close to a park", two teachers valued a centre in a good neighbourhood or on a farm respectively and in each of the following cases, one preferred that the centre should either be in a quiet neighbourhood, outside of the city, in a small town "where everybody knows everybody", or close to the church.

5.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2 Environment: healthy and safe

(a) Category 2.2.1 Security, safety and supervision

Inclusion criteria	This category includes data related to safety and security measures; teachers being trained in first aid; full-time supervision.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes data that do not refer to safety and security aspects, first aid and supervision.

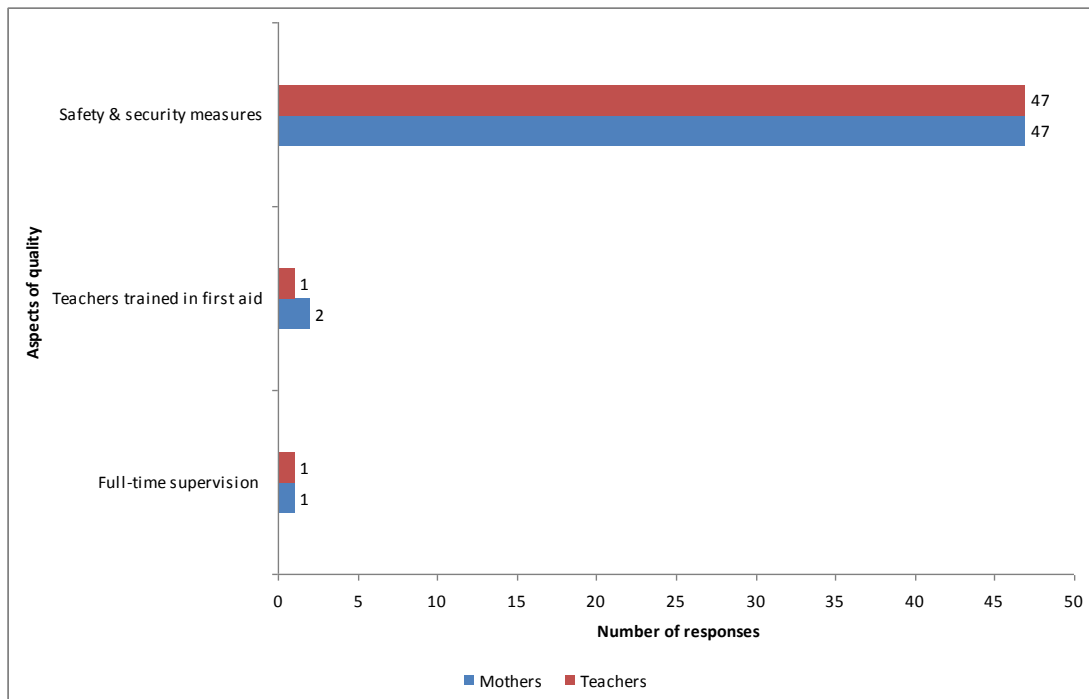


Figure 5.7: Security, safety and supervision in the centre

According to the responses captured in Figure 5.7, safety and security in early learning centres is the one aspect that was not only ranked the highest of all factors, but was equally important to mothers and teachers. Forty-seven mothers and forty-seven teachers mentioned the presence of safety and security in their responses. In South Africa, where the crime rate is very high and every citizen is concerned about safety issues, it is not surprising that this aspect scored the highest number of responses.

T204: “A quality centre offers safety and security, and has the best possible staff.”

M174: “I expect the centre to be a safe place where there is full-time and constant supervision of the outside play area, as well as in the classrooms”.

M175: “The infrastructure and staff is extremely important. Good entrance control at the gates, so that the children will be safe, it must be a safe place”.

Student-participants, too, reflected on security aspects and shared their insights on the teachers’ role in ensuring security for the children.

R14: “Children need an environment where they are stable and secure. I have learnt that you have to create this environment in your classroom and it’s a lot of work if the learners come from difficult homes. I have found that many children have problems at home, I feel sorry for them but I still have to reprimand them if they behave badly. I found that speaking and spending extra time with the children calms them down, and I have a better understanding of their actions in their group of friends. If a child acts out of the ordinary you have to observe the child more closely and decide whether it is a once off action or the child might have a problem. The teachers create a caring and trusting environment where the children with problems can feel safe and secure”.

Two mothers and one teacher referred to the teachers’ abilities to perform first aid as a requirement for a quality centre. One student-participant explained how health issues were dealt with in the early learning centres where she was located, and another referred to the question of allergies.

R36: “There is always one teacher on “eina”¹¹ duty. She sits on a specific chair inside, always in the same place, Teachers are rotated daily. Every injury, no matter how small, is treated with antiseptic and mercurochrome. Each injury is documented, what happened, where it happened, to be shown to the parents when learners are picked up from school. For any injury that appears more serious than the average scrape or bruise, the learner’s parents or guardians are phoned and informed. This helps to keep parents informed and helps them to feel more in control of what happens to their children at the school. It also offers the educators, principal and school some security against lawsuits or negligence”.

R23: “I did observe that there were no posters on the wall with the children’s allergies and this I find is very important in case of an emergency.”

Only one teacher and one mother specifically indicated that there should be sufficient fulltime supervision by the teachers.

(b) Category 2.2.2 Hygienic environment

Inclusion criteria	This category includes data related to clean, neat and hygienic environments as well as neat boys' and girls' bathrooms.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to clean, neat and hygienic environments and separate bathrooms for boys and girls.

¹¹ “Eina” is an Afrikaans word similar to “ouch” indicating that something is sore and that someone is experiencing pain

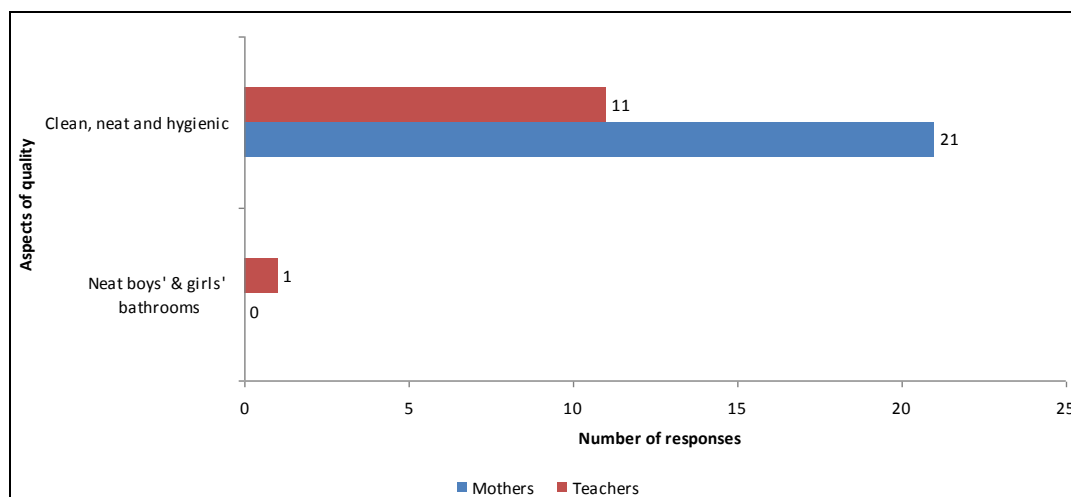


Figure 5.8 Hygienic environment

It is apparent from Figure 5.8 that it was more important for mothers than for teachers that there is proper hygiene and that the centre is clean and neat. Many mothers (21) and fewer teachers (11) regarded hygiene, cleanliness and neatness to be important.

M158: "My child must be safe and happy. The classroom must be clean, neat and conducive to learning".

T 229: "Discipline and hygiene are the most important aspects."

Only one teacher specified that a quality early learning centre should have separate neat bathrooms for boys and girls.

5.3.2.3 Sub-theme 2.3 Language of teaching and learning

Inclusion criteria	This category includes data related to the language of teaching and learning: specifically home language; English; Afrikaans; bilingual centres.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes data that do not refer to language of teaching and learning.

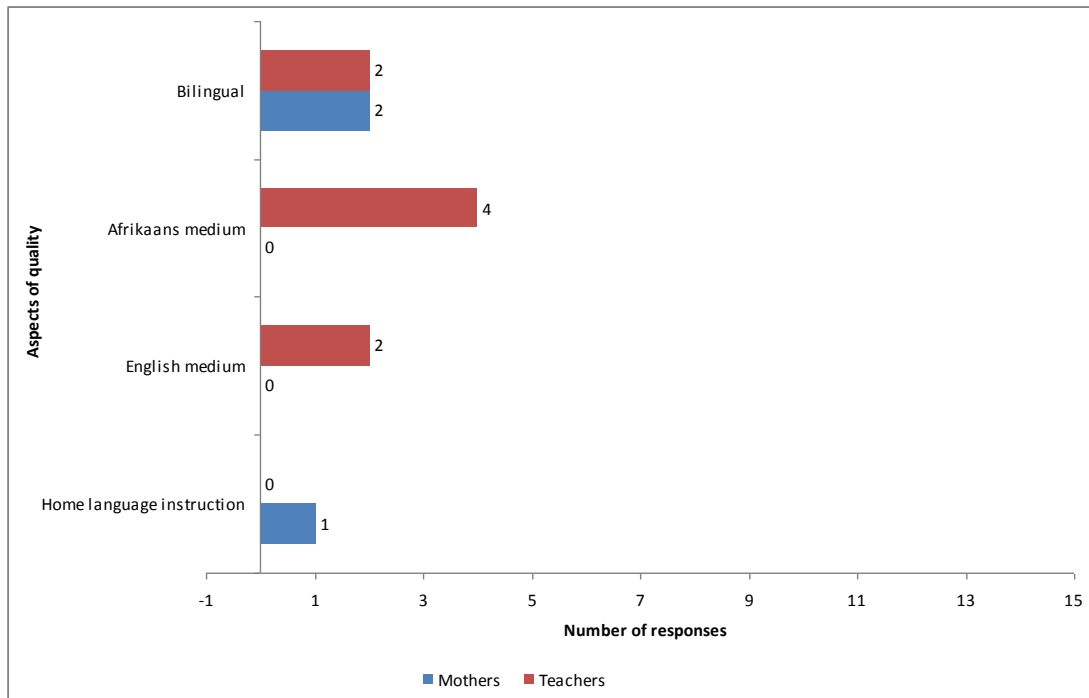


Figure 5.9: Language of teaching and learning

From the number of responses depicted in Figure 5.9 it seems that language of teaching and learning was not considered by many participants to be a measurement for quality. The highest number of responses concerning language issues is four. It was of significance for four teachers that Afrikaans is the medium of instruction in the centre. Two teachers felt the same about English.

T68: "A learner-centred school that teaches the children in English to prepare them for the near future, although it is their second language".

Regarding language issues, a student-participant wrote the following in her reflective journal:

R44: "There are children who are very sad and refuse to leave their parents. I think the reason for that is that they are being educated in a language other than their home language which complicates communication with their teachers and friends".

Only one mother noted that the centre should offer home language instruction, and an equal number of mothers and teachers (2 each) considered a bilingual centre to be a quality aspect.

T42: "A centre that is well-situated, fully bilingual, has well-qualified educators and that is committed to the well-being of the child".

M 169: "A school that still has religion and that is bilingual is important for me".

5.3.2.4 Sub-theme 2.4 Non-discriminatory and accepting atmosphere

From the data obtained through the interviews, two categories became apparent under this sub-theme. The first category deals with the non-discrimination and respect and the second category with an atmosphere in the early learning centre that is accepting and accommodating.

(a) Category 2.4.1 Non discriminatory and respectful atmosphere

Inclusion criteria	This category includes data related to non-discriminatory and multicultural centres; respectful treatment of children and children being taught to be respectful.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to non-discriminatory and multicultural centres and a respectful atmosphere.

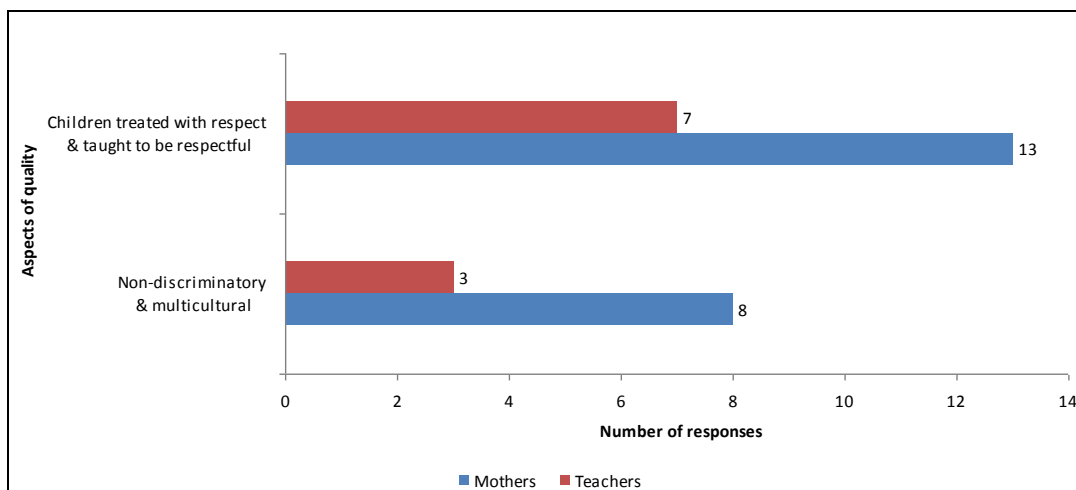


Figure 5.10: Non-discriminatory and respectful atmosphere

From the responses illustrated in Figure 5.10 it is noticeable that respect was highly valued by mothers and teachers. It is evident because thirteen mothers and seven teachers considered treating children with respect and teaching them how to be respectful to others as very important considerations.

M175: "My child must be at a school where honesty, integrity and loyalty are instilled and where he is taught how to respect differences".

Student-participants captured their experiences about respect in the quotes below.

R38: “The teacher is very passionate and I’ve learnt that all these children just want to be loved. You show them respect and they will show you respect”.

R37: “Mrs. Z is a lovely teacher and the children enjoy her class, there is also a good level of respect and the discipline is also very fair”.

For eight mothers and three teachers multicultural centres that are non-discriminatory indicated quality.

T30: “A school where everybody is friendly, helpful, a Christian school where there is no discrimination and where children with special needs are welcome and can receive therapy.”

(b) Category 2.4.2 Accepting and accommodating atmosphere

Inclusion criteria	This category focuses on an accepting and accommodating atmosphere in early learning centres: being small and personal; caring, loving and peaceful; friendly and safe; relaxed and comfortable; positive and lively; warm and homely; family-like; family orientated; welcoming to parents at any time; generating happy parents.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to an accepting and accommodating atmosphere in early learning centres.

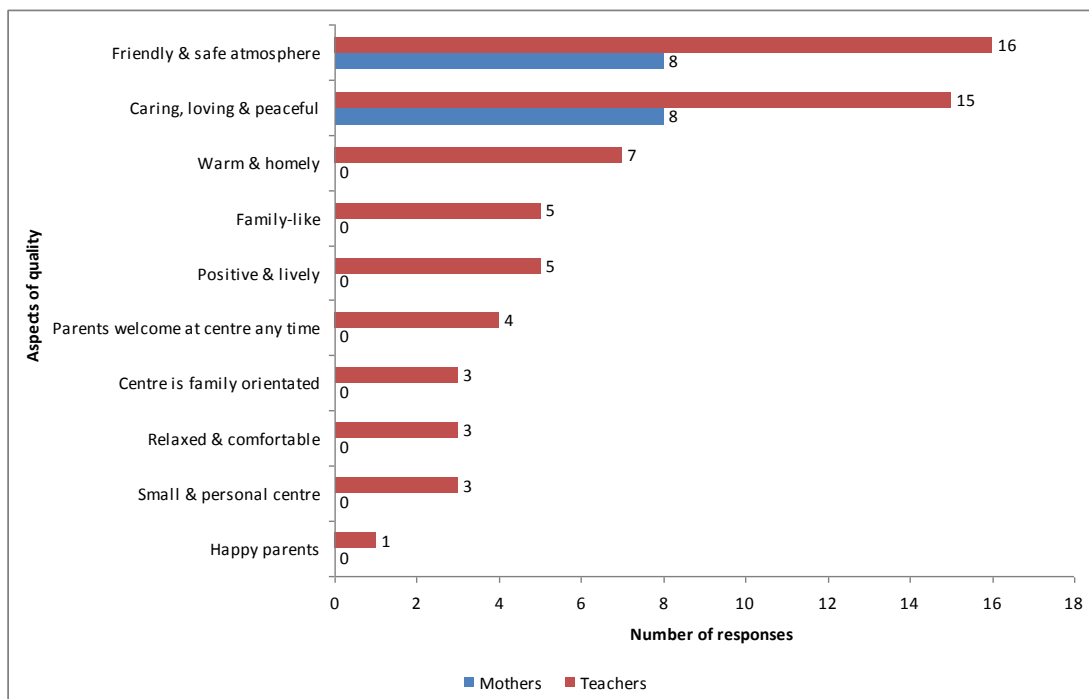


Figure 5.11: Accepting and accommodating atmosphere

From the number and variety of responses illustrated in Figure 5.11, atmosphere as an indicator of quality appears to be an aspect of importance to both mothers and teachers. Participants used a wide variety of words to specify the atmosphere they

consider to be conducive to learning. Eight mothers and double the number, sixteen teachers, said that the atmosphere must be friendly and safe. For fifteen teachers and eight mothers a caring, loving and peaceful atmosphere signifies quality.

M174: "The most important aspect is that my child will experience love, acceptance, uniqueness, care and security".

Since the student-participants were specifically requested to comment on the atmosphere in the centres, they used many different ways to explain their experiences in this regard.

R6: "The atmosphere in the school was a very happy one. This was created by energetic and enthusiastic educators. I found all the educators very welcoming. I noticed that all the children were happy on arrival and eager to start their day which indicated that school was an enjoyable place for them. Children and educators seem to have very good relationships with a healthy balance between respect and affection for each other".

R18: "The school feels and becomes the 'second home'."

R7: "The children always seem to want to be at the school and don't ever seem to have a problem with saying goodbye to their parents".

R28: "These teachers are just amazing. I have learnt so much in the past weeks. Their wisdom in handling children with problems has taught me that although a child may seem past all hope, you can never give up. You need to strive to make sure that each child is safe and protected and that they are able to grow and be nurtured in your care".

R47: "I can see that the teacher loves the children. She focused on emotional intelligence. I think it is good because that is something that one sometimes neglects and actually it is so important, but there must also be balance".

The rest of the responses captured in Figure 5.11 reflect the teachers' and student-participants' opinions. Seven teachers regarded "warm and homely" as the ideal atmosphere. A student-participant described her experience as follows:

R14: "The moment you step into the school you feel welcome and special. I thought the teachers only treated me this way because I am a student. They treat the parents, children and other people the same, and most importantly they aren't fake, their warmth towards others is genuine".

Five teachers each valued atmosphere that is family-like, positive and lively.

T10: "Every child must be treated as an individual and the school must be like a big family".

The student-participants explained their experiences as follows:

R32: "The teachers treat the children like family, everyone knows everyone. The children don't ask when they will be going home, for them school is where they want to be".

R46: "Today the atmosphere in the classroom was very positive. This is achieved by playing soft background music in the background".

Four teachers pointed out that a quality centre is one where parents are welcome at any time. There were three teacher responses for each of the following: family orientated; a small and personal early learning centre, and one with a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. A student-participant gave the following explanation:

R25: "Today I have learnt that it is very important to make children feel at ease in their school environment".

One teacher suggested that a quality centre has an atmosphere that ensures that the parents are happy.

A factor that came forward clearly in the reflective journals, but not from any of the interviews, was that the atmosphere of a centre can also be influenced by the weather. The reflective journals were kept in a particularly rainy January and therefore most of the student-participants commented on the weather, especially the inconveniences caused by the rain and the adaptations that had to be made. The student-participants concluded that in terms of quality, centres need to be able to be adaptable in terms of the activities offered in the programme and they should also have facilities in place to deal with challenges posed by the weather. According to the student-participants, teachers need to be flexible and creative, especially when the weather complicates planned activities.

R9: "Because of constant rain the children were unable to go outside and this resulted in a lot of tension and restlessness".

R12: "The teachers' welcoming and positive attitudes, despite the weather, seemed to set an uplifting atmosphere for the children. The children seemed quite happy and comfortable at the school".

R48: "The weather plays an important role in determining the atmosphere in the school. If it is too hot the children are not eager to do activities".

R39: "Today the weather is cold and rainy, this made the children restless because the routine would change slightly and they would have to be kept indoors most of the day. The teachers handled the children very well in keeping them busy with all sorts of activities. One the teachers set up a little mini obstacle course in the main hall to ensure that the children did some exercise to get rid of some energy. I thought it was going to be chaos but it was handled very well by the teacher".

5.3.2.5 Sub-theme 2.5 Centre's reputation

Inclusion criteria	This category focuses on centres that are well established; exclusive and/or private schools; have a good reputation; promote the motto that "only the best is good enough for your child".
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to an early learning centre's reputation.

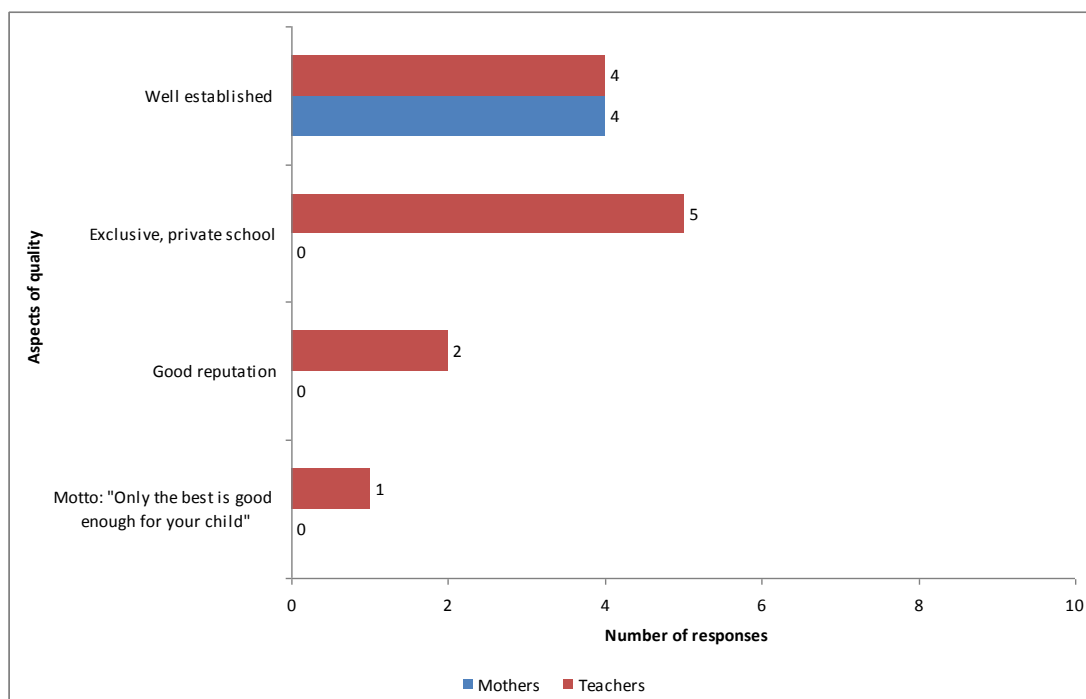


Figure 5.12: Centre's reputation

Figure 5.12 reveals the responses referring to the reputation of early learning centres. Only a few mothers (4) and teachers (4) remarked on the fact that a well-established centre that has existed for many years can be regarded as a quality institution. The rest of the responses were the opinions of teachers only. For five teachers, but no mothers, an exclusive or private school indicated quality.

T45: "A private school with small classes [indicated quality]. In small classes learners are able to receive individual attention".

Only two of the teachers referred to the good reputation of the centre to indicate good quality and for one teacher it was portrayed in the centre's motto that "only the best is good enough for your child".

5.3.2.6 Sub-theme 2.6 Centre management and leadership

Inclusion criteria	This category focuses on centres that have a vision for the future; are organised and well managed; have a dynamic principal; managed by the SAVF ¹² .
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to the management and leadership of early learning centres.

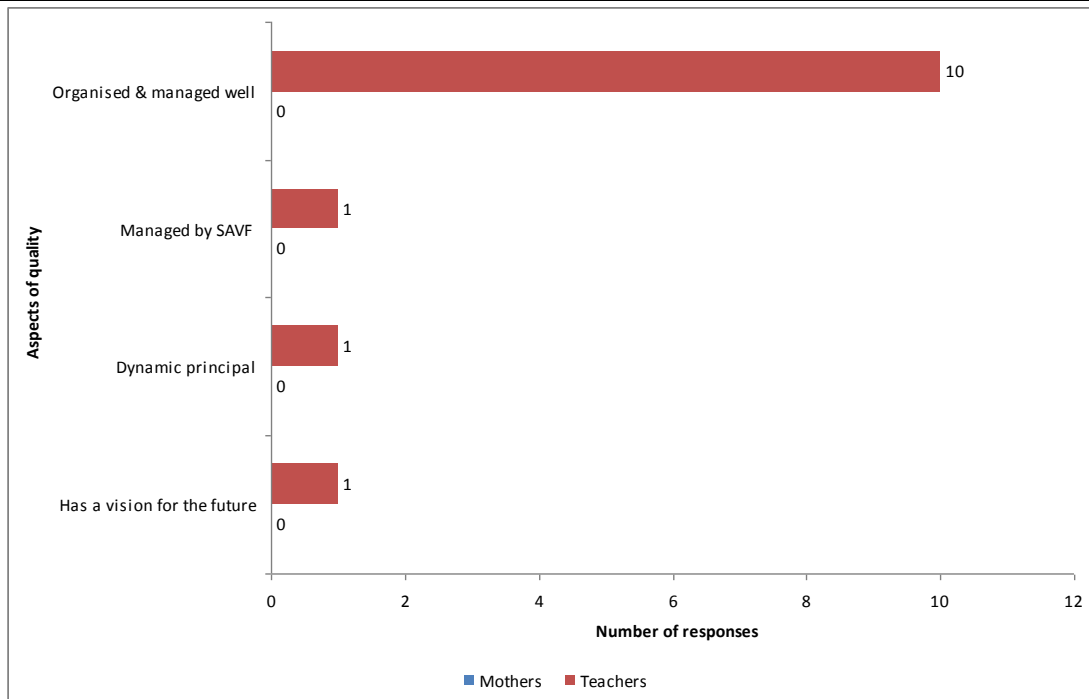


Figure 5.13: Centre management and leadership

In Figure 5.13, the responses about management and organisation are revealed. It is interesting to note that the responses concerning management and leadership in early learning centres were all made by teachers. Only a few teachers referred to these matters in connection with quality. However, ten teachers valued a quality centre as one that is well organised and managed.

T200: "It is important to have a preschool that is well organised and that has a very strong and dynamic person that is in charge".

The following responses give an indication of the student-participants' perceptions about the organisation and management in early learning centres:

R35: "I would want the teachers to be a bit more organised as it helps with the smooth running of the day".

R1: "The head teacher was indicating to me that the school sometimes makes it difficult for her to do her job because the children can enrol into the school at any level and she always has to start from the beginning with the child and that sometimes happens very late in the year".

¹² SAVF is the "Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie", a South African women's society.

R41: “I came to realise by the end of the day that children up to the age of compulsory schooling also desperately need to be in a structured environment and once without their parents, cope better than any mommy would ever realise”.

The following statements were made by individual teachers and are considered to be aspects of quality: “the centre is run by the SAVF”, “the centre has a dynamic principal” and “the centre has a vision for the future”.

A fieldworker reflected on the role of the principal as follows:

R41: “Perhaps it is the headmistress that determines the general atmosphere of the school, which is welcoming and friendly despite the first tears”.

5.3.3 Theme 3: Learners' requirements and expectations

Theme 3 deals with learners' requirements and expectations. This theme is sub-divided into two sub-themes namely teachers' qualifications, relationships and conduct; and optimising learner development. The first sub-theme is further sub-divided into categories.

5.3.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1 Teachers' qualifications, relationships and conduct

The first category to be discussed under the sub-theme: *Teachers' qualifications, relationships and conduct*, deals with the learner-teacher ratio.

(a) Category 3.1.1 Learner-teacher ratio

Inclusion criteria	In this category the focus is on aspects related to the learner-teacher ratio, for example having a small number of learners in the class; adequate staff; assistants for each class; a low staff turnover that provides stability.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes data that do not refer to a learner-teacher ratio.

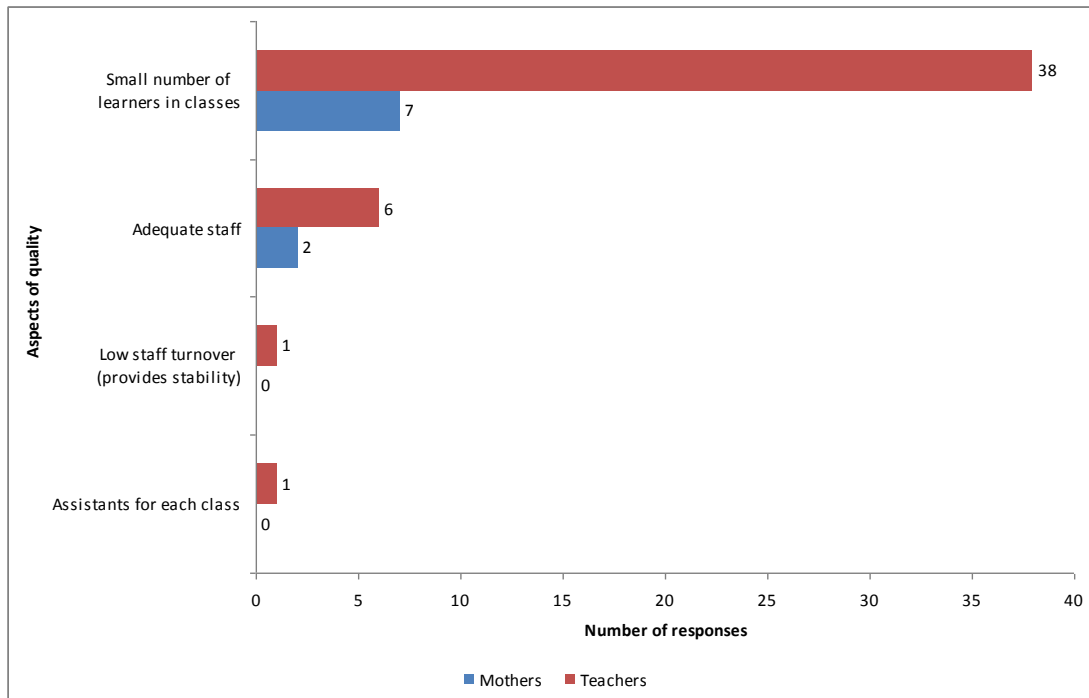


Figure 5.14: Learner-teacher ratio

In Figure 5.14 the most outstanding aspect is the large number of responses from teachers (38) who expressed that a small number of learners in a class is an indication of quality. In contrast, only seven mothers shared the same opinion. Since the teachers are physically present in the playrooms every day, the number of children vastly influences the available space (or lack of space) and influences the provision of individual attention to children. These factors might explain why this aspect seems to be much more important to teachers than to mothers.

T64: "A preschool with only a small number of learners in a class and where the children are treated as individuals and get a lot of attention is important".

M195: "Small classes to allow for individual attention".

M194: "The size of the class is very important to me because I want my children to get attention at school and there must not be too many children to the teacher, as she will feel overwhelmed".

A student-participant had a similar understanding of the number of children in a class:

R48: "The atmosphere is being determined by the number of children in the class. The fewer children there are in the class, the easier you get to work with the class. Each one then gets equal individual attention".

Six teachers and two mothers stated that enough staff members signifies quality. One teacher referred to the following as quality criteria: having an assistant for each class and having a low turn-over by keeping the same staff members in the centre and thereby providing stability.

T6: "There is a low turnover of staff, support for colleagues and the principal and assistants in each class".

(b) Category 3.1.2 Teachers' qualifications, abilities and attributes

Inclusion criteria	This category includes data related to the teachers' qualifications, abilities and attributes and focuses on teachers that are qualified; informed and regularly attend staff courses; well prepared; capable; experienced; excellent; dedicated and motivated and professional.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to teachers' qualifications, abilities and attributes.

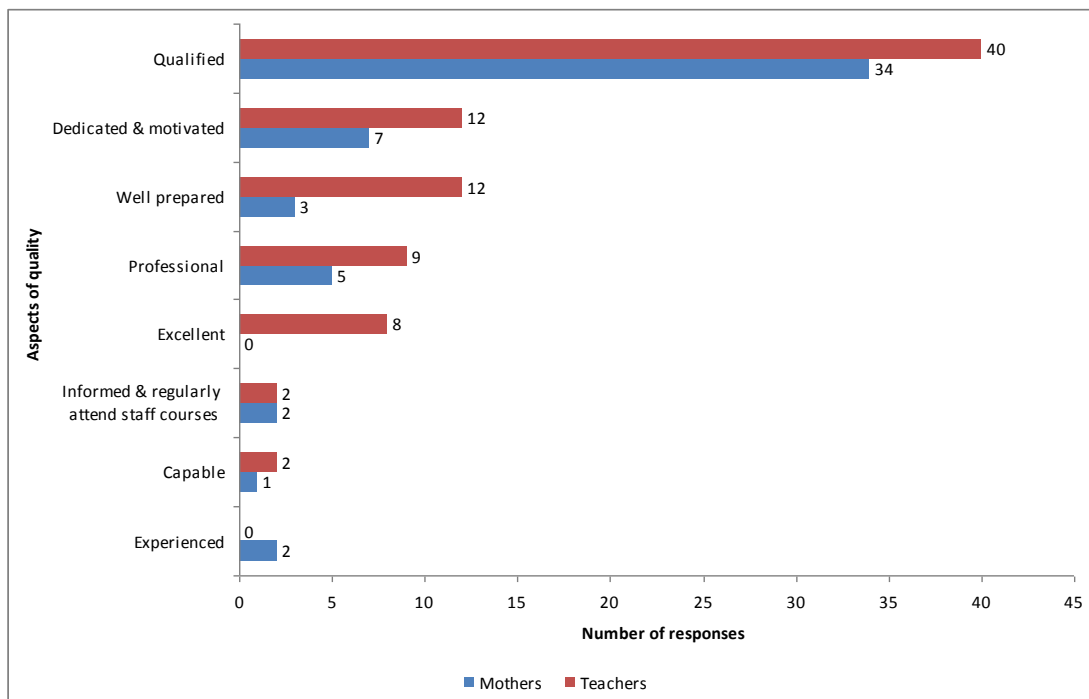


Figure 5.15: Teachers' qualifications, abilities & attributes

In Figure 5.15, teachers' qualifications, abilities and attributes are illustrated. Having qualified teachers in an early learning centre seemed to be a priority in terms of quality for teachers as well as mothers. Many teachers (40) and mothers (34) specifically indicated the importance of having qualified teachers.

T8: "Excellent, well trained teachers with a broad field of knowledge about education is essential".

M175: "The teachers must preferably be qualified and have a good curriculum vitae".

Student-participants' experiences of well trained teachers are captured in these quotes:

R44: "Because all the teachers are trained they are capable of attending to the children and supporting and helping each other".

R28: "The atmosphere is so positive and uplifting that you cannot help enjoy being around these teachers. They are all such a wellspring of knowledge and more than happy to share it with me".

Twelve teachers and seven mothers rated dedication and motivation in teachers as a quality trademark.

M194: "I believe that the teacher must be happy and motivated and there must be a good support system within the school for the teachers and the principal must be willing to back up her/his staff".

Eleven teachers and three mothers remarked that teachers that are well prepared indicate quality. The student-participants reported in their reflective journals on the importance and value of being prepared:

R15: "I have learnt that preparation is the most important thing a teacher can do. A well prepared learning activity helps the teacher and learners achieve the learning outcomes. It also makes it easier for the teacher to adapt the activities to suit the children's needs".

R32: "I realised that being prepared does not only benefit myself but also the learners as I am more relaxed when things are in order. I discovered that things don't always go the way you wanted but you have to be prepared to be flexible and open to variety and change".

R46: "The atmosphere and cooperation of the children are being determined by an effective daily programme and the attitude of the teacher towards the children. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the teacher must be well prepared for each day".

For nine teachers and five mothers, professional teachers are symbols of quality.

One student-participant had the same perception:

R7: "My teacher has a lot of experience and is so flexible and very good at her job, so there is seldom something I would change".

Another student-participant noticed how a lack of professionalism can convey a negative message to outsiders.

R35: "I would not allow the teachers to have cell phones during school time. I find the fact that some of the teachers are answering their phones during class time rude and frustrating".

Two participants of each group indicated that teachers must be well informed and attend staff courses regularly. The last few responses in this category were mostly singled out by the teachers. Eight teachers specifically considered excellent teachers to be a mark of quality whereas two mothers referred to the importance of teachers having experience. Lastly, two teachers and one mother said that a capable teacher is a quality asset. In terms of capability, two student-participants noted:

R35: "I have learnt that you should be enthusiastic when teaching and put lots of effort into your lesson and it should go well".

R18: "Teachers must be able to think on their feet, improvise and solve problems as soon as they arise. Sometimes you must be firm".

(c) Category 3.1.3 Teachers' conduct

Inclusion criteria	This category includes data related to teachers' conduct and focuses on teachers who are positive role models; caring, warm and loving towards children; supportive and helpful; passionate; listen to children; address problems immediately; observe well; have realistic expectations of children; are friendly; loyal; honest; fair; patient; trustworthy, reliable and responsible; in control; do not shout at children; can express themselves in their work.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to the positive conduct of teachers.

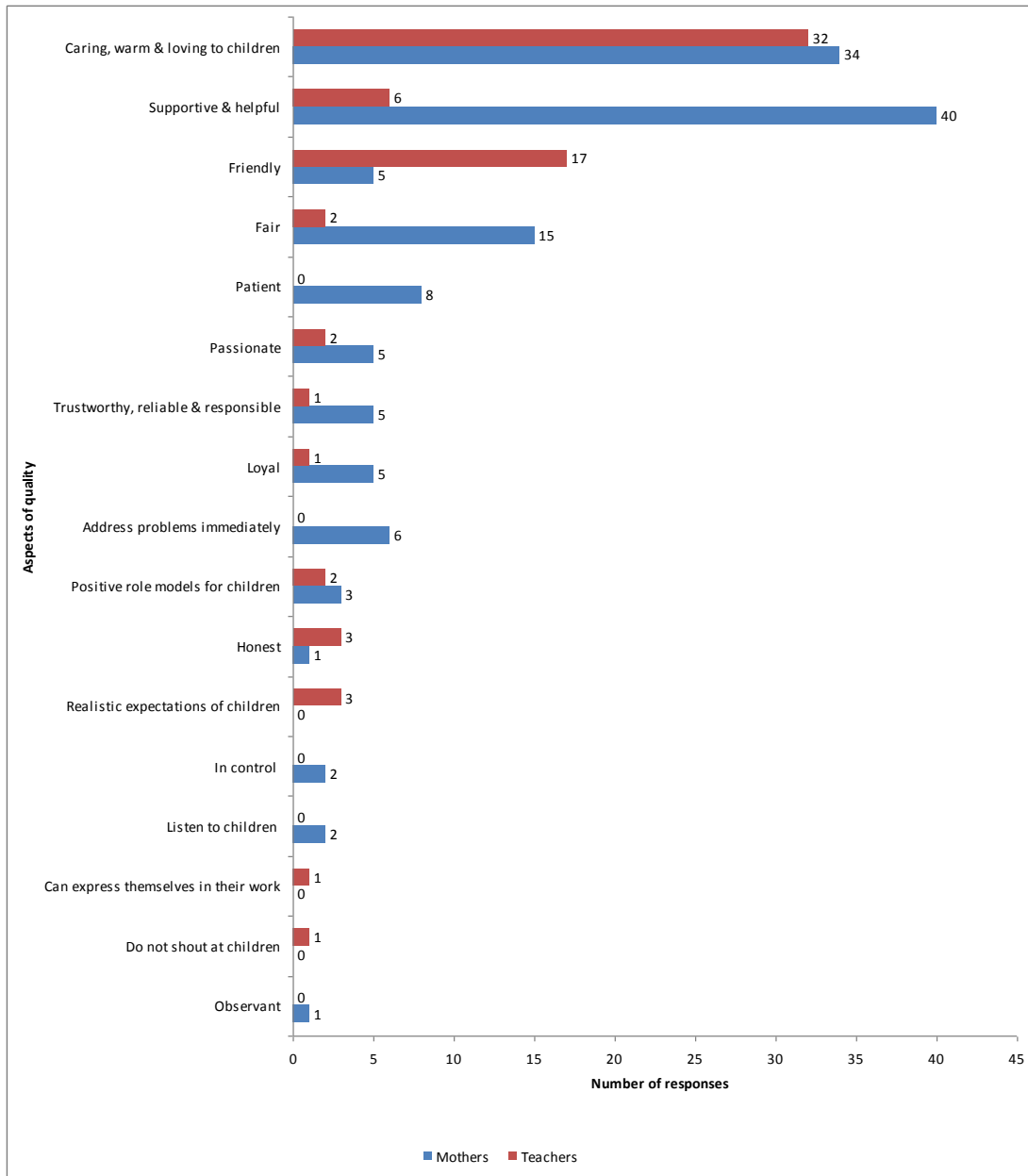


Figure 5.16: Teachers' conduct

In the third category, as depicted in Figure 5.16, it is evident that the majority of teachers (32) and mothers (34) all shared the opinion that the love of the teachers and their care and warmth towards the children are essential ingredients for good quality in early learning centres.

M154: "For me an early learning centre is only successful if I can see that my children are really happy. This is not determined by the appearance of the centre or the reputation that it has. Only honest, loving and dedicated staff for me carry out the image of a good preschool".

The role that teachers play is evident from these reflective journals quotes:

R15: "Teachers play a huge role with the atmosphere of the school and their attitude affects the attitude of the learners in their class".

R7: "The relationship between the teacher and children was friendly, stern but motherly. In my class I would be a little less stern and talk to them slightly differently, I felt sorry for them because they are still very young".

In this section, there was one determining factor for quality of extreme importance for many mothers (40), namely that teachers must always be prepared to be helpful and supportive. Six teachers had the same opinion.

M139: "She must look after my child when I am at work, she must be her parent during the time when I am not there and she must comfort her if she does not feel well".

Student-participants also reflected on teachers' helpfulness and support:

R13: "The teacher is very helpful, but also critical in order to maintain a high standard of education".

R15: "Teachers have to be constantly aware of the children's needs and how to support them".

Seventeen teachers and five mothers confirmed that teachers' friendliness contributes towards the atmosphere and quality experienced in an early learning centre. A fieldworker agreed with them.

R37: "I would definitely say the friendliness of the teachers in the school determines the atmosphere".

Many mothers (15) specified that teachers must be fair, and two teachers agreed with them. It is interesting to note that only mothers (8) regarded teachers' patience as an aspect of quality. Patience was perceived as vital by student-participants.

R33: "Patience is definitely the key to teaching. I realised that I need to learn how to gain the children's respect as well as be their friend".

R31: "I learned that a teacher's patience is of the utmost importance. One has to be stern but friendly at the same time. Therefore it is a balance of both the aspects".

R16: "The teacher's attitude towards the children determines the children's attitude. If they were enthusiastic the children would want to do things. I noticed the teachers were friendly, encouraging and patient with the children".

For five mothers and two teachers a fundamental characteristic of quality is teachers being passionate.

T178: "Passionate teachers with a vision for the future to help children to cope with modern society and very strong values based education".

Student-participants also experienced passion and enthusiasm as pivotal for quality education.

R25: "Through this experience the most important things I have learnt about teaching is that one has to be well prepared, open-minded and above all to be passionate – passionate about the children and about teaching".

R16: "The teachers' attitude towards the children determines the children's attitude if they were enthusiastic the children would want to do things. I noticed the teachers were friendly, encouraging and patient with the children".

A few mothers (5) in comparison with a single teacher, remarked on the trustworthiness, reliability and responsibility of teachers. Student-participants noticed the value of trust between teachers and children as well.

R15: "Children will only trust people if they prove their trust to them and are able to keep it".

R14: "I have learnt a lot, and see now that it is my responsibility as a future teacher to give children my best, so that they can benefit and grow".

Loyalty seems to be more important to mothers (5) than to teachers (1). A few mothers (6) pointed out that problems should be addressed immediately, but none of the teachers commented on this. Three mothers and two teachers agreed that in quality centres the teachers should be positive role models for children. A student-participant confirmed that view.

R18: "The teacher comes across as loving, caring and someone to look up to".

Honesty and openness in the teachers were noted as quality characteristics by a few teachers (3) and one mother.

M147: "I expect the teacher to be honest with my child. She must build him, not break him down. She must also be open with the parents – good or bad. This will build a good child from all different sides".

Only three teachers, but no mothers regarded a quality centre as a place where teachers have realistic expectations of the children. On this matter the following reflections were made by the student-participants:

R39: "Today I assisted with a lesson in the Grade R classroom. I was amazed how short an attention span the children actually have and they very quickly get rowdy. I thought the teacher handled her class very well in keeping them interested and occupied. I can feel that she sets a very strong atmosphere of 'you are here to learn' and is very attentive to the children's needs. I can see that they trust her and respect her by the way they behaved when asked to do so".

R35: "I would not lose my temper so much when the children are naughty because they are still children".

R25: "I learnt that it is important to keep lessons and discussions brief as the children become distracted and restless very quickly. I did however pick up some good techniques for capturing the children's attention and calming them down. The teacher uses little rhymes and songs as well as short movement activities".

Only two mothers highlighted that teachers should be in control, whereas none of the teachers specifically emphasised that. In a school situation children are always expected to listen to the teachers, however, two mothers stipulated the opposite, namely that teachers must also listen to children. This statement was also considered as important for two of the student-participants.

R47: "I have learnt that discipline and routine are very important for children, even though they rebel against it. I also learnt that one must listen to what children say".

R48: "You, as the teacher, must really listen carefully to what the children are telling you, because there might be a message for you as teacher about the situation at the home of the child".

For one teacher it was an indication of quality if teachers can express themselves in their work and another one, valued teachers who do not shout at children. The views of three student-participants' concerns about shouting are evident in the following quotes.

R16: "Today I watched the reprimanding of a child I thought was a little harsh and unnecessary as the child was actually only playing, yes he was being disruptive but I would have maybe only moved him away from his friend instead of causing a huge fuss and putting him on the sad chair".

R1: "The teacher retains discipline by shouting but the children respect her because they know not to cross the line".

R47: "I got a fright when the teacher shouted at the children. Today the teacher was not ready for her class and therefore the children were very rowdy".

Lastly, one mother regarded teachers who are very observant as an aspect of quality.

(d) Category 3.1.4 Relationships between teachers, parents and children

Inclusion criteria	This category includes data related to the different relationships in early learning centres and is focused on teachers building trusting relationships with children; good relationships; good cooperation and communication between staff and parents; and having approachable teachers.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to the relationships and communication between teachers with other staff members, parents and children.

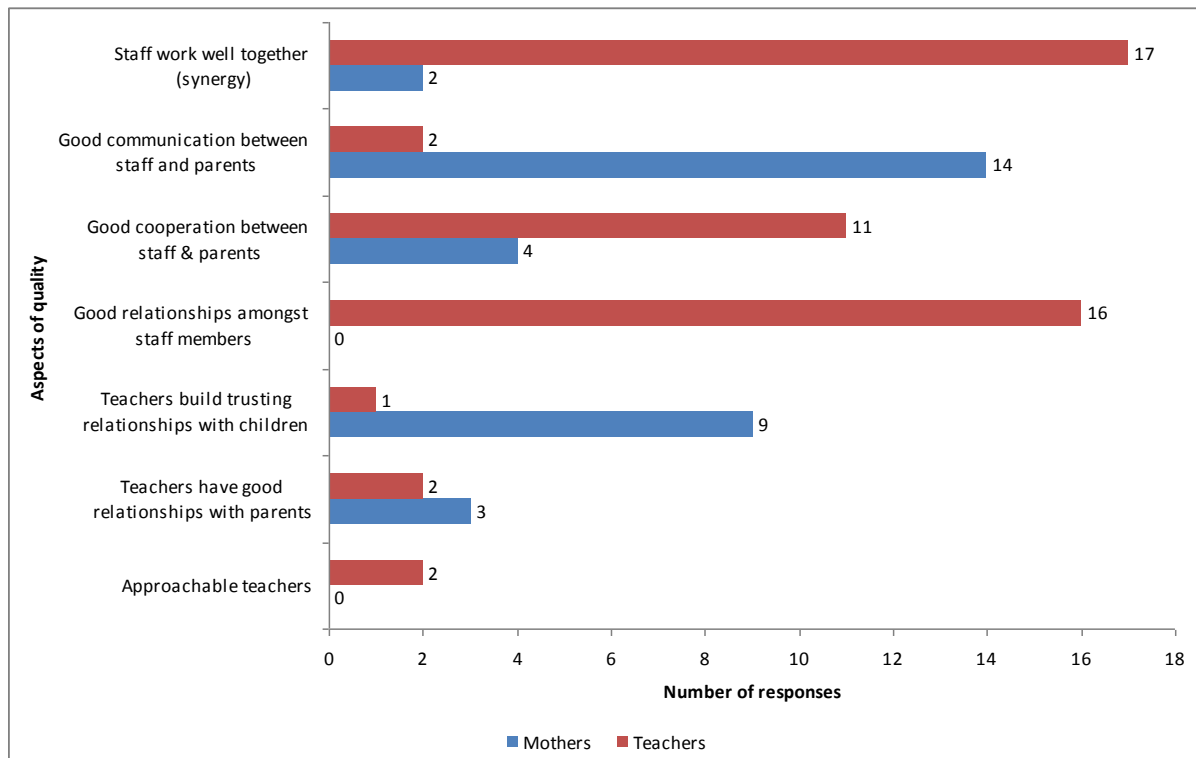


Figure 5.17: Relationships between teachers, parents and children

The fourth category, illustrated in Figure 5.17, deals with relationships amongst the teachers themselves, as well as with the mothers and with the children. In this category the fact that staff can work well together and create synergy was the most prominent response and was given by many teachers (17) but only by two mothers. This seems logical considering the reality that the teachers speak from first-hand experience and because they personally are in relationships with peers every day.

For many (16) teachers good relationships amongst staff members represent quality in a centre. Many of the student-participants, who dealt with various teachers during their three weeks teaching practice experience at the centres, commented on the

contribution (positive or negative) that such staff relationships had on the atmosphere in the centres.

R6: "The atmosphere at the school is very warm and all the teachers get on very well with each other. They spend time chatting and laughing while watching the children during free play. It is a very warm and happy place to be".

R7: "The relationship between the teachers was one of friendliness and fondness".

R3: "The relationship between the teachers is very good, they chat and also share jokes".

R12: "The teachers appeared to have a good relationship with each other and the teachers were friendly towards each other".

R13: "The teachers interact very positively with each other and are extremely flexible".

R14: "The teachers in the school are professional and they treat each other with respect. There is no rivalry between the teachers and they work together as a team".

R1: "The relationship between the teachers is always very good and there is good communication. There is no tension between the teachers".

R38: "I get along well with some of the teachers, but there are two of the teachers who I don't know where I stand with and they just make no effort to be friendly".

R33: "The teacher of this class did not interact with the other teachers at all, creating a tense atmosphere during break time".

R34: "Watching the children's behaviour at school indicated to me that they enjoy being at school. The teachers all have a happy and helpful relationship with one another and their relationship with the children is very caring and encouraging".

The following quotes from the student-participants' journals particularly emphasise the importance of good communication amongst staff members and specifically highlight the value in terms of the discussion and solving of problems.

R7: "There is a good sense of communication and understanding between the teachers and other members of staff".

R18: "There is an open communication amongst the teachers and they consult each other for advice".

R13: "Teachers confide in each other about problems they face and therefore work towards a solution together".

R16: "The teachers mainly only discussed problematic children with each other, and work, so the relationship was on a professional basis".

For many mothers (14), good communication between staff and parents was also an indication of quality. In comparison, only two teachers shared that opinion.

M179: "I like good communication between parent and teacher because that prevents many problems. I also expect of the teacher to understand the child's circumstances at home and keep them in mind when she handles him/her. The teacher must know that I leave my 'little piece of gold' in her care".

M194. "I expect my child's teacher to advise me if anything out of the ordinary happens at school that directly affects my child".

A student-participant's experience about the importance of communication with a parent is evident in the next quote:

R33: "I learnt that one child can actually affect the whole class. One little girl disrupted the entire class. A meeting was set with her mom for the next day as she was hurting and bullying all the little girls that were smaller than her. I learnt that you have to cope with these difficult situations and not take your frustrations out on the other children".

Another student-participant also remarked on the involvement of parents in the school.

R14: "It is important to have parents involved in the school and education of their child".

Nine mothers stated that good relationships of trust built by teachers with children, reveal quality in early childhood centres. Only one teacher shared the same view. The reflections on the relationships between the children and the teachers are apparent in the student-participants' words below.

R13: "The teacher-learner relationship is becoming much stronger and learners are beginning to trust their teachers more and more every day".

R7: "The teachers have a very good relationship with all the children and the children just adore their teacher".

R18: "In the learners' eyes the teacher means everything to them. When they get hurt, they want to know something or share news, they turn to their teachers".

R14: "The children love coming to school. The children trust their teachers completely and insecure children find security next to their teacher's side. I think these teachers are great examples of what preschool teachers should be and I hope I will be like them".

A few mothers (3) and teachers (2) felt that teachers must have good relationships with parents, whilst two teachers also stressed the fact that approachable teachers are of importance in a quality centre. Student-participants also noted the value of good communication with parents.

R11: “The parents are involved and daily want to know how their child’s behaviour was and what they have learnt through the day”.

R2: “I have learnt that parents are often more difficult to communicate with than the children and that issues have to be dealt with firmly yet also with sensitivity towards the child and the situation as a whole”.

5.3.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2 Optimising learner development

Inclusion criteria	This category includes data related to aspects focused on optimising learner development and includes evidence of every child being important and receiving individual attention; children being the number one priority; developing children’s identities; children having the opportunity to develop to their full potential and learning independence; creating social interaction opportunities; and generating happy and contented children who are enjoying school.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes data that do not refer to aspects related to optimising learner development.

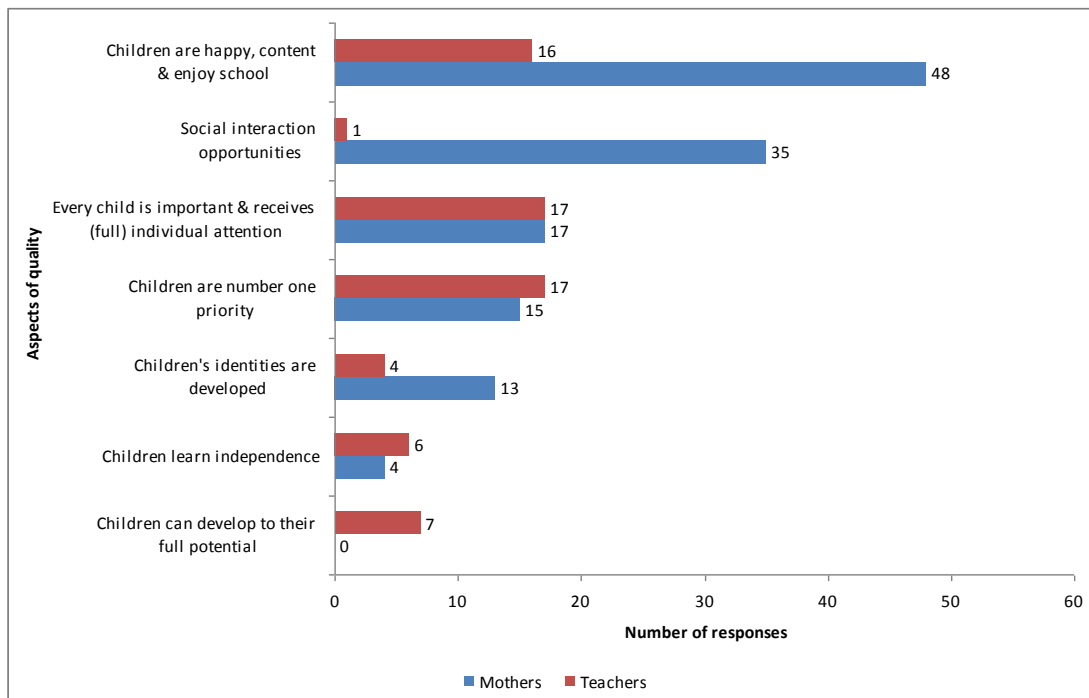


Figure 5.18: Optimising learner development

Figure 5.18 illustrates that the one response that received the most votes from beneficiaries about any aspect, is that forty-eight parents, as well as sixteen teachers, pointed out that children in a quality centre are happy and content and that they enjoy school.

M145: “My child must learn through play, her small world must be expanded and she must do activities that she enjoys and which are not forced upon her”.

M239: "My child's well-being must be considered at all times and the most important aspect of everything is that the school is a place that he can enjoy".

M194: "My children must be happy and feel at home. They must be excited to go back to school for longer than two weeks. If they learn something at school the learning process must be fun and not a chore, which will put them off learning for life".

The importance of happy, contented children is also evident from student-participants' reflections:

R3: "The children clearly enjoy being at the school, this is evident through the running around and playing".

R18: "Teaching is a great deal of fun! You must have the right mind set, be prepared and have fun. There is no point in attempting an activity that you won't enjoy – then the class won't enjoy it either".

R45: "I found it interesting to see how little it takes to make children happy, for example my discovery table".

R44: "The fact that children immediately start to play when they have been dropped off at school indicates to me that they enjoy being at school".

Also very high, with thirty-five responses from mothers, was the opinion that enough opportunities for social interaction must be available to children. This fact was only important for one teacher, but four student-participants commented on the children's social needs and behaviour:

R10: "The teacher and the children share a very special bond. The children often cry when their parents drop them off at school but the teacher comforts them and soon they are happy and start playing with the other children".

R5: "The learners enjoy going to school and learning and being able to have social interactions. The learners were happy and full of energy".

R48: "Many children play alone when they are at home and don't want to mingle with other children when they are at school, that is why I think you have to play one or two games in groups where everybody can participate".

R41: "The children are happy to follow routine but enjoy free play just as much. I anticipated the children to be rowdy and naughty but they are surprisingly very calm, relaxed and happy. The children on a whole play well with one another and mostly interact in a positive light".

An equal number of participants, seventeen teachers and seventeen mothers felt that in a quality centre every child is important and must receive full, individual attention. The same observation was made by a fieldworker:

R2: "The little ones are very close to their teacher and are constantly asking her questions and competing for her attention. The teacher is very patient with them and soothes them easily if they become upset".

Seventeen teachers and fifteen mothers stated that children should be considered as the number one priority in an early learning centre.

T202: "The child's happiness and well-being must always be considered as the most important aspect".

A student-participant confirmed the importance of the children's needs.

R14: "The needs of the learners in the school are the priority".

It seems to be much more important to mothers (13) than to teachers (4) that children's identities are developed at the centre. The view of one student-participant in this regard was:

R18: "The group enjoys school and it is clear that they feel they have the freedom to be who they are".

For six teachers and four parents it was essential that children learn to become independent. A student-participant observed independence personally.

R18: "The children seemed content and satisfied. They take control of situations. I can see independence (fight their own battles), yet obedience (tidy up)".

Only teachers (7) commented that a quality centre will give children the opportunity to develop to their potential.

5.3.4 Theme 4: Requirements and expectations in terms of services and facilities

In Theme 4, the focus is on requirements and expectations in terms of services and facilities. This theme is sub-divided into two sub-themes namely *Available services* and *Facilities that are child-friendly and conducive to development*. The first sub-theme is further sub-divided into two categories, *Core services (time and food)* and *Additional services (extramural activities, therapists and outings)*.

5.3.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1 Available services

(a) Category 4.1.1 Core services: time and food

Inclusion criteria	The focus of this category is on core services and includes data related to affordable fees; centres providing a good service to the community; centres being open for long hours and many days; the provision of good food: and centres offering services for babies to Grade R.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes data that do not refer to the provision of core services like food and available hours.

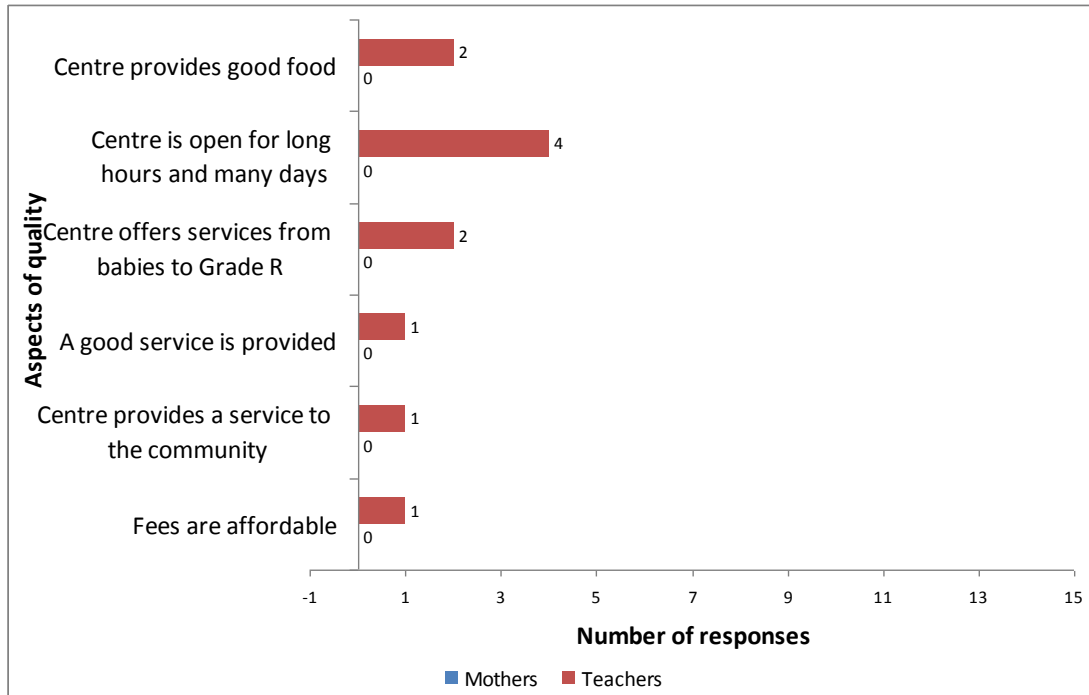


Figure 5.19: Core services: time and food

Figure 5.19 points out that all the responses about core services, surprisingly, were only made by teachers and not by mothers. Two emphasised that if good food is provided, quality is indicated. In terms of food, the student-participants remarked as follows:

R25: "The learners ate their lunch on the mat and not at the tables which I think would have been better".

R1: "Eating for the children is very stressful and a very emotional matter even for the senior group who also find it difficult to sit and eat their food instead of running around. The teachers themselves are so drained that they see this time as a time to relax a bit, so to supervise the children becomes a bit of a chore, but they have decided to take turns".

R38: "The school is very strict about the meals that the learners bring to school. They are very health conscious and encourage the learners to be active".

The following responses were also only made by a few teachers: Four teachers emphasised the accessibility of a centre for long hours and many days as important, however, none of the mothers specifically mentioned that. Two teachers indicated that a quality centre offers services for babies up to Grade R. One teacher said that a quality centre provides a service and another said it provides a good service to the community. Contrary to my expectations only one person, a teacher and not even one mother, commented on the costs of the centre and explained that affordable fees are an indication of a quality centre.

T57: "A centre that is cost effective and has well trained people is very important".

(b) Category 4.1.2 Additional services, extra mural activities, occupational therapists, outings

Inclusion criteria	This category includes data related to the availability of aftercare service the provision of extramural/extra activities; outings; occupational and speech therapists; provision for individual/special/unique needs; provision of additional attention if needed: transport service
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to the provision of additional services in early learning centres.

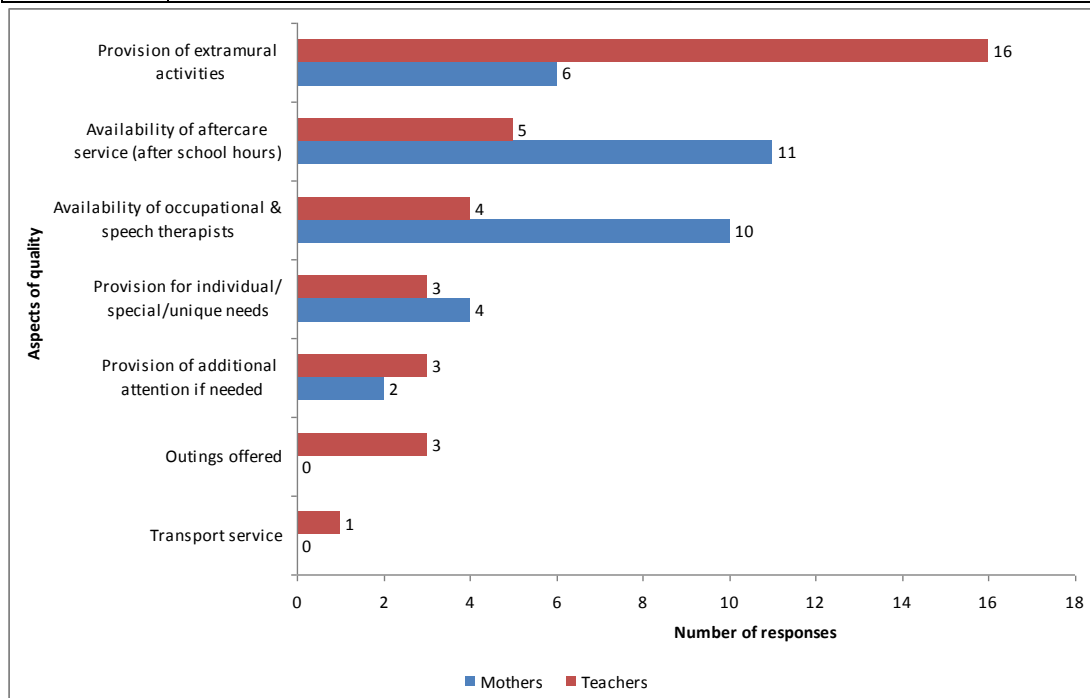


Figure 5.20: Additional services, extramural/extra activities, occupational therapists and outings

When additional services are portrayed in Figure 5.20, it is significant to note how the different beneficiaries vary in their opinions. Many teachers (16), for instance, pointed

out that the extramural/extra activities determine quality in the centre. This view is shared by six mothers.

T 60: "A spacious school that offers many extra activities for the children like music, Playball and ballet".

From one of the student-participant's comments it seems that some of the extramural activities that are offered during structured learning activities cause disruption to the daily programme.

R35: "I would work the daily programme out in such a way that the extramural activities do not disrupt the classes or that they fall in free-play".

Regarding another aspect, eleven mothers singled out the provision of an aftercare service as a quality trait, with five teachers having the same response. Ten mothers and four teachers remarked on the availability of occupational and speech therapists as a service determining quality centres. A few mothers (4) and teachers (3) mentioned that quality centres should make provision for individual, special or unique needs. Four student-participants reflected on children with special needs:

R28: "The atmosphere on the last day was a little stressful as one of the learners with behavioural problems had become overwhelmed and had struck out against other children. He had started his day angry and violent and had to be sent home early. The other learners were extremely tense and so the teachers allowed an extended play time just so that they could move past their fear. But the day was a wonderful success and everyone enjoyed spending time talking and enjoying this last day together".

R14: "Teachers work together to form plans to incorporate children with special needs into the program, and plans to cope with children with behaviour problems. Teachers carry a great responsibility, they have to ensure that the children in their classes receive the best education and possible special needs are recognised easily".

R32: A new boy joined the school today, a Down syndrome child, he is four turning five. I was surprised to see how the older children reacted and I was even more surprised to see that the other children tried to help him if he couldn't do anything and they didn't mock or were mean to him. They seemed quite happy and content to have him in their class".

R15: "I have found that I am very good with helping children with learning and behavioural disabilities, I have a lot of patience and I can encourage and compliment children in an honest and positive way".

A few teachers (3) and mothers (2) indicated that additional attention must be provided to children if needed. Two student-participants gave their opinions about additional attention, even about including other children in the process.

R35: “Give learners individual attention when they are feeling lonely or upset”.

R14: “Children who attend this school love the school and teachers. They are always kept busy and teachers encourage children to play with lonely children until they find their feet”.

Only a few teachers (3) remarked on outings that the centres offer as a quality characteristic. One person, a teacher, mentioned that a centre with a bus service for the transportation of children emphasises a quality service.

5.3.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2 Facilities that are child-friendly and conducive to development

Inclusion criteria	This category includes data related to child-friendly facilities with well-maintained equipment; environments that promote development; spacious classrooms and playgrounds; interesting and well-designed playgrounds; fully equipped centres; various and sufficient apparatus and toys; outstanding infrastructure; centres with a big media centre; many trees; garden and pond.
Exclusion criteria	This category excludes references that do not refer to child-friendly facilities that are conducive to children’s development.

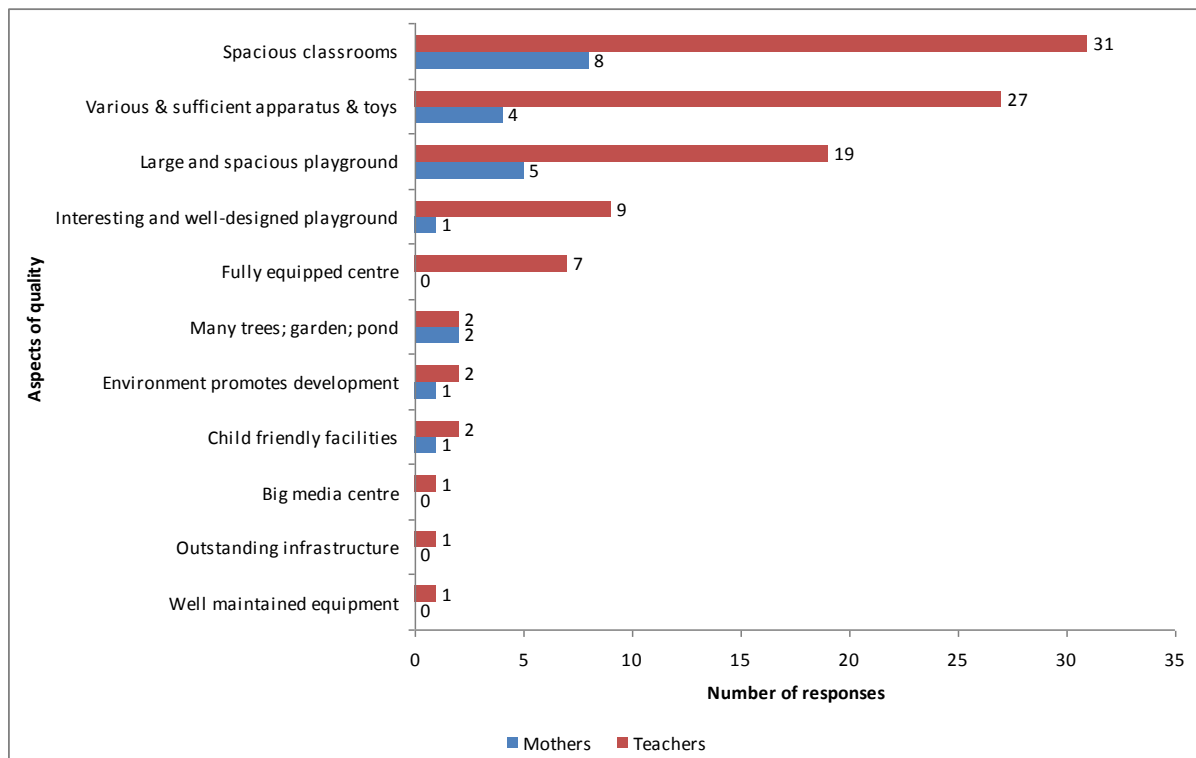


Figure 5.21: Facilities that are child-friendly and conducive to development

In this category regarding facilities, Figure 5.21 illustrates that the aspect with the most responses indicates that quality centres have spacious playrooms (classrooms).

A large number of teachers (31) commented on this although only eight mothers had the same opinion. The fact that the teachers themselves are physically present in the playrooms every day might be the reason why this factor seems to be so much more important to teachers than to mothers.

Student-participants' experiences of the space or the lack of space in playrooms are evident in the quotes below.

R5: "The classrooms are all very welcoming and are filled with interesting areas for the children to play in. The classrooms are child-centred".

R17: "As I entered the centre I was welcomed by an environment, which was bright and inviting".

R28: "It is very hard to do side activities when there are 25 boys in the class as there is little space and even the simplest activities need supervision. So I've had to limit the amount of activities that need to be done at one time".

"A quality centre has sufficient and a variety of apparatus and toys". This opinion of many teachers (17) was shared by only four mothers. The following quotes explain how the student-participants experienced the place and role of apparatus in terms of creating atmosphere.

R18: "The environment was inviting with a big variety of apparatus and toys that are stimulating on many levels, a very positive atmosphere, excellent facilities, great teachers and the children have a sense of belonging".

R37: "Everyone is very welcoming and the amazing condition of the school is also very inviting. The children love coming to school. They are enthusiastic and are all encouraged to make friends with each other. The variety of equipment also encourages the learners to participate".

R25: "I felt that the teacher could have made more of an effort to make her classroom attractive so as to make it more interesting for the children".

Spacious playgrounds were more important for teachers (19) than mothers (5).

T144: "The classrooms are big and spacious and the playground outside can be seen in one glance. This enables the teachers to have control over the children at all times".

One can assume that these responses are more common amongst teachers than mothers because the teachers are physically working in those environments every day. An interesting, well designed playground was singled out by ten teachers, whereas only one mother signified it as an important quality determinant. For seven

teachers a quality centre is one that is fully equipped. One of the student-participants acknowledged the value of a well equipped outside area.

R43: "The outside play area is full of toys and it is colourful which creates a friendly, welcoming atmosphere".

The last categories concerning the facilities are responses made by only a few beneficiaries. For two mothers and two teachers a quality centre has many trees, a beautiful garden and a pond that provides opportunities for science and biology. Two teachers respectively mentioned that a quality environment promotes development and that the facilities are child friendly. These opinions were shared by individual mothers. One student-participant felt that user-friendly facilities contributed to a happy atmosphere.

R34: "Generally there is a happy atmosphere about this school as the facilities are user friendly and the staff is all very helpful and involved".

The rest of the responses concerning the facilities were only rendered by teachers. Single responses from teachers indicated a big media centre, an outstanding infrastructure or well-maintained equipment as quality characteristics.

5.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the results derived from the data sources were analysed according to themes, sub-themes and categories in a thematic analysis, as well as cross-case comparisons between the different participants. In the next chapter, I give an interpretation of the results and I present the findings related to the theoretical framework and existing literature.